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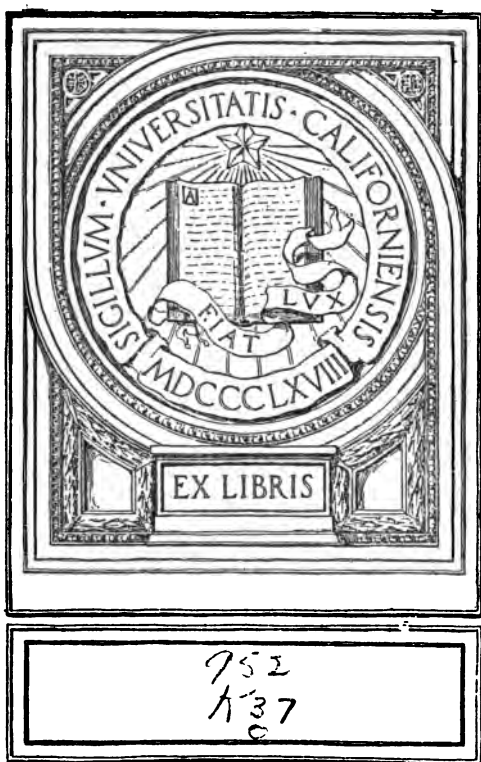
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*OTIA*

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# UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA





ARMINE THOMAS KENT

ÆT. XXXV

# O T I A

*Poems . Essays . and . Reviews*

*By Armine Thomas Kent*

*Edited by Harold Hodge, with a*

*Memoir by Arthur A. Baumann*

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ARMINE THOMAS KENT, ÆT XXXV. . . *Frontispiece*

ARMINE THOMAS KENT . . . . . *To face page* 2

*(From an etching by Mrs. Stark ; done in 1903)*





*The Editor desires to express his  
acknowledgments to the Editors of  
the "Fortnightly Review," "National  
Review," "World," "Cornhill Maga-  
zine," and "St. James's Gazette."*



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# OTIA

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3' *Armine Thomas Kent*

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“You might have won the poet’s name,  
If such be worth the winning now.”

**A**RMINE THOMAS KENT was born on July 25, 1856, and was the sixth and youngest child of Thomas Fassett Kent. His great-grandfather, Nathaniel Kent (1737–1810), was the son of Ambrose Kent of Penton Mewsey, Hampshire, and was in early life secretary to Sir James Porter, English Minister at Brussels, where he had an opportunity of observing Flemish methods of farming. He afterwards became an authority on agriculture in Norfolk, published several works on the subject, and laid out the Flemish and other farms at Windsor for George III. He married Armina North, great-granddaughter of Roger North, author of the “Lives of the Norths.” Their son Thomas, after distinguishing himself at Trinity College, Oxford, and giving promise of a brilliant career at the Bar, died in his twenty-eighth year, leaving an infant son (Thomas Fassett) by his marriage with Dorothy

Cox, who afterwards became the wife of Dr. Blomfield, Bishop of London. Thomas Fassett Kent (Armine's father) was brought up in all respects as one of the Bishop's sons, and among his half-brothers were Sir Arthur Blomfield, the architect, Alfred Blomfield, Bishop of Colchester, and Admiral Henry John Blomfield. He was educated at Harrow and Balliol, combined a fine scholarship with a love of sport and outdoor life, corrected his critical faculty by a rare sense of humour—two qualities which he transmitted to his son—and practised at the Bar. A few years before his death, which occurred in 1871, when Armine was fifteen, he was appointed Counsel to the Chairman of Committees in the House of Lords, then Lord Redesdale. Armine's mother (Cecilia Victorine) was the youngest daughter of Sir John Shelley, Bart., first of Michelgrove, Sussex, and later of Maresfield Park, Sussex. Sir John Shelley (whose baronetcy must not be confounded with that of the poet's branch of the family) was one of the best-known members of the Prince Regent's set, and won the Derby twice. Mrs. Kent was, her daughter tells me, a clever, well-read woman, an accomplished linguist, and gifted with much force of character and charm of manner. She died in 1872. Armine Kent was thus deprived of both his parents at the age of sixteen. His elder sister Mary, who married the Rev. Edward B. Ainger, was his senior by eleven years, and was

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*From an etching by Mrs. Stark done in 1903*

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appointed his guardian by their father. Whatever there was of guiding and restraining influence in Armine's early life was due to the tactful affection and conscientious discharge of her duty by Mrs. Ainger. Jowett, when writing about a private tutor for Armine, complimented Mrs. Ainger on being "a very good guardian" to her young brother. The position was not without its anxieties and worries, but the sister was in some measure repaid by the devotion of the brother, who felt her death in 1889 as he had never felt anything before. I am indebted for the above facts about the family to his second and surviving sister, Mrs. Stark, who, as his executrix, has authorized me to deal with his papers, and requested me to write this memoir for his relatives and friends.

Kent and I went up to Balliol together in October, 1874. He had been at Harrow and found plenty of friends in college. But instead of sliding into his school set, he joined four or five of us in forming a little cave of rebels against the arrogance of the Balliol intellectuals.

Kent had been *proxime accessit* for a scholarship, so that we were proud of his support. Reaction against priggism, however, is not a wholly safe or beneficent motive; and for the first two years at all events it must be said that our "Youth was full of foolish noise." But Armine Kent could not have been passed over by the most purblind



don, for there was no mistaking his distinction of mind and manners, which attracted the least impressionable. He was very handsome, and his manners had a charm which it was as difficult to define as to resist. On reflection, I think that he won people by a kind of appealing simplicity of address, by the directness and refinement of his language, and by a shyness which made him often reticent, but never rude. He had his moods of murmuring, like most poets ; but his strong sense of humour almost invariably broke the spell of melancholy. His humour was certainly original, for there was nothing he enjoyed laughing at so much as himself. He loved being chaffed, and the mimicry by a friend of any of his little peculiarities never failed to provoke peals of his laughter. Even in those early college days, when the principles of most young men are "sketchy," Kent developed two strongly marked qualities which never left him, and which formed the most salient features of his strange character. One was his almost morbid detestation of personal gossip. I call this quality almost morbid because it is obvious that if personal gossip were taboo, conversation would be reduced to "Shakespeare and the musical glasses," and the ordinary dinner-party would become a palace of silence. But Kent was so loyal and enthusiastic a friend that he could not bear to hear the slightest depreciation of any one who stood, or had ever stood, to him

in that relation. He resolutely discouraged the dissection of absent friends, and if he could not change the conversation, he either showed his disgust by silence, or he took up the cudgels and was often provoked into defending the indefensible. If his sensitiveness in this respect was a little excessive, it was surely a noble trait, for I can say of him, as I can of no one else whom I know, that I never heard him speak evil of a living soul.

His other characteristic was his incapacity of submission to any authority. Though he loved Johnson almost as much as I do (which is saying a great deal), he did not agree with the Doctor that subordination is the keystone of society. He never could be got to allow that, outside the law, one human being had any right to control another. He even denied the right of any one to inquire into the affairs of another. A steely glare of resentment was the only answer he ever vouchsafed to the conventional query, "Well, what are you doing now?" The college and university authorities he despised and defied. We went in for Classical Greats together, and some foolish examiner had set as the subject for the English essay, "Sympathy." Kent took up his pen and wrote quickly, "Sympathy is human, but apathy is divine." Then folding up his paper and throwing it on the table, he left the room. It is needless to say that he was ploughed, and had to take his pass degree a year later from St. Edmund's Hall.

IN 1881 Armine Kent came to live in London, and began to write prose and verse for magazines and newspapers. Articles and verses appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, the *National Review*, the *Cornhill Magazine*, the *St. James's Gazette*, and in a weekly journal called the *Court and Society Review*, long since extinct. It is to the credit of the race of editors that they at once discerned Kent's distinction of style. Famous London editors are, as a rule, "swift of despatch" rather than "easy of access" to unknown writers. Their desks are too often the dumping-ground of hopeless but persevering amateurs. When, therefore, a young man of twenty-five, without introductions, or social influence, or a prize-winner's record, finds his first productions published by editors like Mr. John Morley, Mr. Frederick Greenwood, and Mr. James Payn, his is an unusual success. Mr. Payn wrote of some lines which appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*, that they had "the true bird note." \* Mr. Greenwood printed some verses at once in the *St. James's Gazette*, and wrote a courteous letter. Mr. John Morley, perhaps the best judge of literature living, gave the greatest encouragement. I have seen two or three letters from Mr. Morley, saying that he would be glad if Kent would write more, and suggesting that he should write regularly. It was about this time that Armine used to talk to me about writing a

\* See p. 36.

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*Armine Thomas Kent*

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history of Latin poetry, a task for which no one was better qualified, and which we used playfully to refer to as his "magnum opus." Here, then, was the beginning, under encouraging auspices, of a literary career that would certainly have brought some money and much reputation. But it was not to be. Several causes co-operated against Kent's living a strenuous and regular life. In the first place, he was the slave of that verbal fastidiousness, which is common to all scholars, and to all in whom the sense of language is abnormally developed. Had you offered him the salary of a judge, I do not think that Kent could have written regularly, or to order. The journeyman work of literature was for him impossible, and in letters, as in any other profession, a man must go through the mill in order to succeed. Kent would only write when he had "something to say," as he put it. That, of course, is fatal to worldly success. Another cause of failure was the possession of a dangerously comfortable income, derived from capital which was unfortunately not tied up. A third obstacle to industry was the hospitality of his many friends, who a little spoiled him. Social popularity is a two-edged weapon. In the hands of one man it is the sword with which he opens the world's oyster : in the hands of another, it is an instrument of suicide. So many friends were delighted to have Kent in their houses for months on end, that what more could he demand of life ?

Their coverts, their trout streams, and their stables were at his disposal ; what more could any man want or get ? It is a question often asked by joyous thirty, but seldom answered till after forty, when it is discovered that amusement bores and only business amuses. Too quickly the years flew by in this pleasant fashion, until the habit of regular work became impossible. I am very glad that four or five years before his death, I was able to introduce Kent to the editor of the *Saturday Review*, Mr. Harold Hodge, who very kindly undertook to edit the writings which form the contents of this volume. I know that the very valuable work which Kent did for the *Saturday Review* gave him keen pleasure, and he formed an immediate friendship with Mr. Hodge, who was very congenial to him.

Of the literary merit of the writings which are, with one or two exceptions, reprinted in this book, those who will read them are as well qualified to judge as I. On the Latin verses I am quite incompetent to pass a verdict, as, though I was condemned in my youth to turn out thousands of iambics and elegiacs, I am not in the technical sense a scholar. A very competent critic, who was also a lifelong friend, describes Kent's literary gift as "an exceptional sense for language and style." This will be admitted by the most captious. His English verse and prose are occasionally obnoxious to the charge of

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## *Armine Thomas Kent*

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obscurity. This was due, not to a confusion of thought, for no one's outlook on life and letters was clearer, but to a desire to escape the commonplace and the obvious in expression.

Kent died of pneumonia at the age of forty-seven in his rooms in Jermyn Street. His end was painless, for he was unconscious during the last three days. The callous, bustling world did not know him, and therefore cannot share our sorrow. But the image of the poet, the scholar, the loyal friend, will remain engraven on the memory of a few, clear-cut and ineffaceable.

A. A. B.

*October, 1904.*

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## *A Thaw*

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**C**OME, Spring, and splinter  
These icy gyves of winter,  
Woo Earth with interlacing limbs,  
and so,  
Tense or a-tremble,  
Repel to re-assemble  
Love's ebb and flow.

Set the hoarse runnels  
Under their snowy tunnels  
With hollow gurgle hurrying to the plain,  
Down the steep dingle  
Whose copses drip and tingle  
With warmth again.

And lo ! Spring looses  
Earth's fetters and unsluices  
The capering juices in the tapering spray ;  
Now for a wreath worth weaving—  
A theft worth thieving—  
A maiden worth achieving—  
Away !

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*Della Crusca and Anna Matilda*

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AN EPISODE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

**M**OST people are more or less vaguely aware that there existed in England, towards the end of the last century, a school of poets, or poetasters, called Della Cruscan ; and that Mrs. Oliphant not long ago suggested, in her "Literary History," that a sketch of their eccentricities might not be unamusing. I propose, accordingly, for the edification of the curious, to recount a few particulars of the Della Cruscan writers, in the days of their prosperity and the days of their collapse. They were, let it at once be admitted, a feeble and frivolous folk ; yet I think that a moral may suggest itself when their story has been told.

In the year 1784, Mr. Robert Merry, a bachelor of thirty, had been for some years domiciled in Florence. That his position and prospects were not of a very definite order was owing to no defect of nurture or opportunity. He had been educated at Harrow at the same time as Sheridan, and afterwards at Christ's College, Cambridge, and was originally intended for



the Bar. To Lincoln's Inn he accordingly made a pretence of belonging till the death of his father, who was a Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company; the family connection with the North Seas being still perpetuated in the name of Merry's Island. Robert Merry at once took advantage of the independence which came to him on his father's death to abandon the Bar and buy himself a commission in the Guards. His liking for high play and high society kept him, for a short time, amused in his new position. He grew, however, once more restless; wandered on the Continent; and became, in the phraseology of the day, a man of letters and of leisure. His love of letters he gratified, at Florence, by becoming a member of the Italian Academy, the *Accademia della Crusca*, and his love of letters and leisure combined by joining himself to an English society who called themselves the "*Oziosi*," and, no doubt, took good care to merit that designation.

The leading spirit of this coterie was no less a personage than Mrs. Piozzi, happily married at last, and safely escaped from the malice of her cold-blooded daughters, and from the virulence with which the English journals had inveighed against her choice of a second husband. Even now the memory of her domestic troubles tended to inspire her with a dejection which the master-pieces of Florentine sculpture were, oddly enough, powerless to remove. As she herself described it,

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*Della Crusca and Anna Matilda*

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in lines at which one cannot help smiling, sincere as they perhaps were—

“The slaves and the wrestlers, what are they to me,  
From plots and contention removed?  
And Job with still less satisfaction I see,  
When I think on the pains I have proved.”

The homages of her countrymen, however, did much to enliven her despondency; and she complacently records in her journals some of the compliments paid her by her fellow-members of the “Oziosi.” They used to address her in this style :—

“E’en so when Parsons pours his lay,  
Correctly wild or sweetly strong,  
Or Greathead charms the listening day,  
With English or Italian song,  
Or when with trembling wing I try,  
Like some poor wounded bird, to fly,  
Your fostering smiles you ne’er refuse,  
But are the Pallas and the Muse !”

The Parsons and Greathead of this all-round panegyric of Merry’s were two members of the “Oziosi” clique: Parsons, a bachelor with a tendency to flirt—to “trifle with Italian dames,” as Mrs. Piozzi poetically put it; Greathead, the newly married husband of a beautiful wife. Both Parsons and Greathead were voluminous contributors to the society’s Album, which soon assumes formidable dimensions. The staple of the contents consisted of high-flown compliments

in verse. Parsons, for instance, would write to Greathead's wife :—

“O blest with taste, with Genius blest,  
Sole mistress of thy Bertie's breast,  
Who to his love-enraptured arms art given,  
The rich reward his virtues claim from heaven.”

And Bertie, as in duty bound, would reply in kind, bidding the sallow Arno pause and listen to the lays of Parsons. As an alternative to these panegyrics, they wrote “Dithyrambics to Bacchus,” “Odes to the Siroc,” or lines on that latest novelty—Montgolfier's air-balloon. Mrs. Greathead was, in fact, as Parsons informs us, the only member of the society who contributed nothing but the inspiration of her charms.

Some of these poems were printed in an “Arno Miscellany,” of which only a few copies were privately circulated. It was a subsequent and larger collection, published in 1785, under the name of “The Florence Miscellany,” which first made its way to England and drew the attention of the English public to the rising school of versifiers. Horace Walpole characterized their productions as “mere imitations of our best poets,” that is to say, of Milton, Gray, and Collins. How justly may be inferred from the opening stanza of Merry's “Ode on a distant prospect of Rome ”—

“When Rome of old, terrific queen,  
High-placed on Victory's sounding car,

---

## *Della Crusca and Anna Matilda*

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With arm sublime and martial mien,  
Brandished the flaming lance of war,  
Low crouched in dust lay Afric's swarthy crowd,  
And silken Asia sank, and barbarous Britain bowed."

The imitations of Milton and Collins are of a like description.

Such as it was, the book was a success, and samples of its contents were reproduced, after the fashion of the day, in the newspapers and magazines—the *Gentleman's*, the *European*, the *Universal Magazine*, and so forth. Of the quality of the poems, critically considered, and of the Della Cruscan poetry generally, I shall have something to say further on. In the mean time, it may perhaps be worth while to disinter a ludicrous passage in one of Merry's contributions to the "Florence Miscellany." The "Oziosi" had one day agreed that each of them should produce by the evening a story or poem which should "excite horror by the description." Mrs. Piozzi's production will be found in her "Autobiography," and is by no means devoid of merit. Merry brought a poem ("a very fine one," says Mrs. Piozzi), in which he introduced the following remarkable ghost, which I commend to the attention of the new Psychical Society :—

"While slow he trod this desolate coast,  
From the cracked ground up rose a warning ghost;  
Whose figure, all-confused, was dire to view,  
And loose his mantle flowed, of shifting hue ;

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## Otia—Essays and Reviews

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*He shed a lustre round ; and sadly pressed  
What seemed his hand upon what seemed his breast ;  
Then raised his doleful voice, like wolves that roar  
In famished troops round Orcas' sleepy shore,—  
'Approach yon antiquated tower,' he cried,  
'There bold Rinaldo, fierce Mambrino died,'” etc.*

But I must not linger over the “Florence Miscellany,” which was but the prelude to those melodious bursts which filled the spacious times of George III. with the music of Della Crusca and Anna Matilda. A year or two after its publication, the Florence coterie broke up and returned to England.

The first note of the concert was struck by Robert Merry, who, in June, 1787, sent to the *World* a poem entitled “The Adieu and Recall to Love,” subscribing himself “Della Crusca,” a nickname which had been given to him at Florence, on account of his connection, already mentioned, with the Italian Academy. The *World* was a daily morning paper, price three-pence, which in more than one respect resembled its modern namesake. A contemporary satirist, writing under the modest pseudonym of “Horace Juvenal,” describes how the young lady of 1787—

“Reluctant opes her eyes, 'twixt twelve and one,  
To skim the *World*, or criticize the *Sun*,  
And when she sees her darling friend abused  
Is half enraged, yet more than half amused.”

And another poet portrays two unlucky baronets

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## *Della Crusca and Anna Matilda*

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—Sir Gregory Turner and Sir John Miller, husband of Lady Miller of Bath Easton vase celebrity—lamenting the ridicule with which the same newspaper had overwhelmed them—

“Woe wait the week, Sir John, and cursed the hour,  
When harmless gentlemen felt satire’s power,  
When, raised from insignificance and sloth,  
The *World* began to ridicule us both.”

“In this paper,” says Gifford, “were given the earliest specimens of those audacious attacks on all private character, which the town first smiled at for their quaintness, then tolerated for their absurdity, and—now that other papers, equally wicked and more intelligible, have ventured to imitate it—will have to lament to the last hour of British liberty.” That literary history is self-repeating, and that prophecies are mostly mistaken, are not new reflections: yet it is difficult to avoid making them when we compare those days with these.

But, beyond its function as a purveyor of social gossip, no newspaper was then considered complete without a Poet’s Corner, consecrated to sentimental effusions and laboured impromptus—“Complimentary Verses to the brilliancy of the Hon. Mrs. N——h’s Eyes,” or “Lines on Lady T——l’s Ring.” In publishing his poem in the *World*, Della Crusca did but select the natural and recognized arena of the eighteenth-century

poet. It may be as well to quote the greater part of "The Adieu and Recall to Love," in order to give some notion of the calibre of the verses which were to found a school—

"Go, idle Boy, I quit thy bower,  
The couch of many a thorn and flower;  
Thy twanging bow, thine arrow keen,  
Deceitful Beauty's timid mien;  
The feigned surprise, the roguish leer,  
The tender smile, the thrilling tear,  
Have now no pangs, no joys for me,  
So fare thee well, for I am free!  
Then flutter hence on wanton wing,  
Or lave thee in yon lucid spring,  
Or take thy beverage from the rose,  
Or on Louisa's breast repose;  
I wish thee well for pleasures past,  
Yet, bless the hour, I'm free at last,  
But sure, methinks, the altered day  
Scatters around a mournful ray;  
And chilling every zephyr blows,  
And every stream untuneful flows.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alas! is all this boasted ease  
To lose each warm desire to please,  
No sweet solicitude to know  
For other's bliss, or other's woe  
A frozen apathy to find,  
A sad vacuity of mind?  
Oh, hasten back, then, heavenly Boy,  
And with thine anguish bring thy joy!  
Return with all thy torments here,  
And let me hope, and doubt, and fear;

---

## *Della Crusca and Anna Matilda*

---

Oh, rend my heart with every pain,  
But let me, let me love again."

I suppose what will strike most readers with regard to these lines is, that they are decidedly fluent and utterly commonplace. That, however, is not the light in which a critic of the last quarter of the eighteenth century would regard them. Amid the dead level of sing-song couplets—the milk-and-water decency of Hayley, the chill and prolix classicism of Pye, the ineffable mediocrity of a thousand Pratts and Polwheles—the fluency of Merry passed, according to the critic's leanings, for fire or for fustian; and the phraseology, which afterwards became hackneyed, was then startling. Take, for instance, Horace Walpole's criticism of the new poetic departure.

"It is refreshing to read natural easy poetry, full of sense and humour, instead of that unmeaning, laboured, painted style now in fashion of the Della Cruscas and Co., of which it is impossible ever to retain a couplet, no more than one could remember how a string of emeralds and rubies were placed in a necklace." Poetry has great merit if it is the vehicle and preservative of sense—that is the critical canon which would have made Walpole as blind to Della Crusca's merits, had he happened to possess any, as it made him keen-sighted for his defects.

It may, nevertheless, be doubted whether Della Crusca would have caused so great a stir in



literature, had it not been for several collateral circumstances, of which the first and most important was the appearance in the *World*, some ten days later, of "Anna Matilda," with a poem entitled "To Della Crusca, the Pen"—

"Oh, seize again thy golden quill,  
And with its point my bosom thrill,  
With magic touch explore my heart,  
And bid the tear of passion start.  
Thy golden quill Apollo gave,  
Drenched first in bright Aonia's wave.  
He snatched it fluttering through the sky,  
Borne on the vapour of a sigh;  
It fell from Cupid's burnished wing  
As forcefully he drew the string,  
Which sent his keenest, surest dart,  
Through a rebellious, frozen heart,  
That had, till then, defied his power,  
And vacant beat through each dull hour.

"Be worthy, then, the sacred loan !  
Seated on Fancy's air-built throne ;  
Immerse it in her rainbow hues,  
Nor, what the godheads bid, refuse.  
Apollo Cupid shall inspire,  
And aid thee with their blended fire ;  
The one poetic language give,  
The other bid thy passion live,  
With soft ideas fill thy lays,  
And crown with Love thy wintry days !"

The shuttle-cock of correspondence, thus fairly started, was diligently tossed to and fro in

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## *Della Crusca and Anna Matilda*

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the *World* by two pseudonymous writers ; Della Crusca "seized his quill" again and again, and his ideal passion for the invisible Anna Matilda gained in fervour of expression with every fortnight. It is obvious that here was just that element of mystery, of romance, which creates a *furor* and sets a fashion.

The lady who signed herself "Anna Matilda" was Mrs. Hannah Cowley, the wife of an absent East India captain, then in her forty-fifth year, and known to-day as the authoress of the *Belle's Stratagem*, a play which still, and deservedly, keeps the stage. Her biographer records the beginning of her literary career as follows : "In the year 1776, some years after her marriage, a sense of power for dramatic writing suddenly struck her whilst sitting with her husband at the theatre. 'So delighted with this?' said she to him. 'Why, I could write as well myself.'" She then wrote *The Runaway*. Many will recollect the extraordinary success with which it was brought out. Her habits of composition were not, perhaps, likely to result in poetry of much excellence. "Catching up her pen immediately as the thought struck her, she always proceeded with the utmost facility and celerity. Her pen and paper were so immediately out of sight again, that those around her could scarcely tell when it was she wrote. She was always much pleased with the description of Michael Angelo making

the marble fly around him, as he was chiselling with the utmost swiftness, that he might shape, however roughly, his whole design in unity with one clear conception." Her preparatory note to her collected "Anna Matilda" poems bears out this account.

The beautiful lines of "The Adieu and Recall to Love" struck her so forcibly that, without rising from the table at which she read, she answered them. Della Crusca's elegant reply surprised her into another, and thus the correspondence most unexpectedly became settled. Anna Matilda's share in it had little to boast; but she has one claim of which she is proud, that of having been the first to point out the excellence of Della Crusca; if there can be merit in discerning what is so very obvious. She further apologizes for one of her poems to Della Crusca, on the ground that it was written while sitting for her portrait, the painter interrupting her with "Smile a little," or "More to the right." Only that class of mind which grows incredulous when informed that orators prepare their speeches will expect much from such methods of workmanship.

Nevertheless, to Mrs. Cowley appears to belong the credit, or discredit, of giving to the Della Cruscan poetry a certain turn or development which did much to make it popular. A hint of this development may be seen in the description of the pen, which was "borne on the

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vapour of a sigh." It took final shape in such phrases as these—

"Hushed be each ruder note ! Soft silence spread  
With ermine hand thy cobweb robe around.  
Was it the shuttle of the Morn,  
That wove upon the cobweb'd thorn  
Thy airy lay ?

"Or in the gaudy spheroids swell  
Which the swart Indian's groves illumine.  
Gauzy zephyrs fluttering o'er the plain,  
In Twilight's bosom drop their filmy rain.

"Bid the streamy lightnings fly  
In liquid peril from thine eye.  
Summer tints begemmed the scene,  
And silky ocean slept in glossy green."

A large and amusing assortment of this ambitious verbiage, which subsequently became in the eyes of the critics the sole "differentia" of Della Cruscan verse, may be seen in the notes to Gifford's "Baviad." It was, however, an after-development, proceeding from a gradual consciousness of flagging powers ; the feeling which induced Charles Reade's Triplet to "shove his pen under the thought, and lift it by polysyllables to the true level of fiction."

The other members of the Florence coterie who, as I have said, were now back in England, speedily began to swell the Della Cruscan chorus in the columns of the *World* and the *Oracle*.

Bertie Greathead, as "Reuben," became Della Crusca's rival, on paper, in the affections of Anna Matilda; and Parsons, signing himself "Benedict," in memory of a sojourn in the Benedictine convent of Vallombrosa, deluged with sonnets an imaginary Mellisa. Whether Mrs. Piozzi contributed anything beyond tea-party patronage appears to be doubtful; but, as was only to be expected, London already possessed a score of indigenous rhymsters, eager to pursue the triumph and partake the gale. One of the principal of these was Edward Jerningham, *alias* "The Bard," who is commemorated in Macaulay's neat sentence: "Lady Miller who kept a vase wherein fools were wont to put verses, and Jerningham who wrote verses fit to be put into the vase of Lady Miller." His brother, Sir William, of Cossy Hall, in Norfolk, kept an album which rivalled in celebrity the vase of Bath Easton, and "The Bard" had been a determined poetaster for the last thirty years. He is described as "a mighty gentleman, who looks to be painted, and is all daintification in manner, speech, and dress, singing to his own accompaniment on the harp, whilst he looks the gentlest of all dying Corydons." Fashionable poets seldom suffer from lack of appreciation. Burke wrote of Jerningham's poem "The Shakespeare Gallery," "I have not for a long time seen anything so well finished. The author has caught new fire by

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## *Della Crusca and Anna Matilda*

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approaching in his perihelion so near to the sun of our poetical system." I think we may be certain, after reading "The Shakespeare Gallery," that the patron of Crabbe did not read it.

Another Della Cruscan songstress was Mrs. Robinson, *alias* "Laura Maria," known to the public as a former mistress of the Prince of Wales, and authoress of various novels. In rapidity of composition she emulated Mrs. Cowley. "Conversing one evening with Mr. Richard Burke" (the Burke family appear to have been sometimes unfortunate in their poetical acquaintances) "respecting the facility with which modern poetry was composed, Mrs. Robinson repeated nearly the whole of those beautiful lines, 'To him who will understand them.' This improvisatore produced in her auditor not less surprise than admiration, when solemnly assured by its author that this was the first time of its being repeated. Mr. Burke entreated her to commit the poem to writing, a request which was readily complied with; and Mrs. Robinson had afterwards the gratification of finding this offspring of her genius inserted in the *Annual Register*, with a flattering encomium from the pen of the eloquent and ingenious editor." She was one of Merry's most ardent admirers.

"Winged Ages picture to the dazzled view  
Each marked perfection of the sacred few,

Pope, Dryden, Spenser, all that Fame shall raise,  
From Chaucer's gloom, till Merry's lucid days."

Her Della Cruscan poems were published under the signature of "Laura," and she was followed by Cesario, Carlos, Adelaide, Orlando, Arno, and fifty more, whose identity can no longer be determined.

A year after his first appearance in the *World*, Della Crusca printed his poems in a volume, and Anna Matilda speedily followed suit. But this was not enough for the reading public. They further greedily absorbed a collection of Della Cruscan verse, published as "The Poetry of the *World*," by Major Topham, the creator and editor of that paper, who, in a dedication to Sheridan, observes: "Of their merit, I am free to say I know no modern poems their superior. I am more happy that your opinion has confirmed mine." It will be well to make allowance for changing literary fashions before we make too sure that Sheridan is here misrepresented. "The Poetry of the *World*" afterwards ran through at least four editions as "The British Album." As we read the publishers' advertisement of this work, which still abounds on second-hand book-stalls—*immorimur studiis lapsoque renascimur ævo*—we seem to be walking in the Bond Street of the Prince Regent. "Two beautiful volumes this day published, embellished with genuine portraits

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## *Della Crusca and Anna Matilda*

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of the real Della Crusca and Anna Matilda, engraved in a very superior manner from faithful pictures, under the title of 'The British Album,' being a new edition, revised and corrected by their respective authors, of the celebrated poems of Della Crusca, Anna Matilda, Arley, Laura, Benedict, and the elegant Cesario, 'the African Boy;' and others, signed The Bard, by Mr. Jerningham; General Conway's elegy on Miss C. Campbell; Marquis Townshend's verses on Miss Gardiner; Lord Derby's lines on Miss Farren's portrait." It is unfortunate that the only pseudonym in the list which it is of so much interest to decipher, should still remain a mystery. It is to "Arley" that we owe the admittedly excellent ballad of "Wapping Old Stairs," which first appeared in the *World* for November 29, 1787, and shines, a solitary pearl, in the pages of "The British Album."

The Della Cruscan mania was at its height—"bedridden old women and girls at their samplers began to rave"—when Gifford, in search of a quarry for a seasonable satire, came before the town with the "Baviad." Of this poem I shall say but little, as it is better known than the writings which it satirized. It contained passages of a certain coarse and rank vigour not difficult of attainment by a student of Dryden and Juvenal. There is, in fact, a sort of Billingsgate raciness about the "Baviad;" and the notes, which are



better written than the poem, contain much amusing matter. The imputation made against the Della Cruscan love-poetry of licentious warmth is, however, wholly absurd—as absurd as the charge made by Mathias, the author of “*The Pursuits of Literature*,” that Merry—

“Proves a designer works without design,  
And fathoms Nature with a Gallic line ;”

a notion which arose merely from the fact that he identified himself with the anarchists of France, and wrote odes for the Revolution Society, thereby acquiring the name, as Madame d'Arblay tells us, of “*Liberty Merry*,” and no doubt also the reputation for free-thinking then associated with everything French. As for detecting any breach of decorum in the mannered and falsetto gallantries of insincere Reubens addressing imaginary Annas, the idea was only possible to a satirist who started with the determination to fling all the mud he could find ; and, it must be added, when he flung it at irreproachable characters, such as Mrs. Piozzi, he did but excite a certain revulsion of sympathy for the victims. Nor was this Gifford's only misrepresentation. He asserted, in order to bring in an apt quotation from Martial, that the interview which finally took place between Merry and Mrs. Cowley produced mutual disgust. This is not the testimony

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of Della Crusca himself in the poem of "The Interview."

"My song subsides, yet ere I close  
The lingering lay that feeds my woes,  
Ere yet forgotten Della Crusca runs  
To torrid gales or petrifying suns,  
Ere, bowed to earth, my latest feeling flies,  
And the big passion settles on my eyes ;  
Oh, may this sacred sentiment be known,  
That my adoring heart is Anna's own !"

Such is the immortality of poetic attachments—

"For ever wilt thou love and she be fair."

That the poet was shortly afterwards "married to another" is sufficient to explain the cessation of the correspondence, from which Gifford argues that the interview resulted in aversion. And he might further have reflected that when a poet is reduced to talk of "petrifying suns," his correspondence has been known to cease for lack of ideas.

The satirized poets did their best to retaliate on Gifford by abusive sonnets in the newspapers ; and Mr. Jerningham wrote a feebly vituperative poem on Gifford and Mathias. The Della Cruscans had undeniably the worst of the battle. The efficacy of Gifford's satire in putting an end to the school is, however, more than doubtful. It is true that it afterwards came to be considered, naturally enough, that he had given the Della

Cruscan their death-blow. Scott, for instance, writing in 1827, observes that the "Baviad" "squabashed at one blow a set of coxcombs who might have humbugged the world long enough ;" but that is not the evidence of contemporary witnesses. Seven years after the publication of the "Baviad," Mathias, in the preface to "The Pursuits of Literature," remarks that "even the 'Bavian' drops from Mr. Gifford's pen have fallen off like oils from the plumage of the Florence and Cruscan geese. I am told that Mr. Greathead and Mr. Merry yet write and speak, and Mr. Jerningham (poor man !) still continues 'sillier than his sheep.'"

This statement is in far better accordance both with the facts and the probabilities of the case. Satire, even first-rate satire, does not kill follies. They gradually die of inanition, or are crowded out by newer fashions. Laura Matilda's dirge in the "Rejected Addresses" is a standing monument of the vitality of Della Cruscanism more than twenty years after its supposed death-blow.

The career as stage-writers of Merry, Greathead, and Jerningham, their bad tragedies and bad farces, do not belong to my present subject. Of the subsequent history of one or two of them a word may, however, be said. Jerningham lived to publish, as late as 1812, two editions of a flaccid poem, called "The Old Bard's Farewell," after which he disappears from life and literature.

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## *Della Crusca and Anna Matilda*

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Mrs. Cowley, perhaps the most interesting of the group, died in rural and religious retirement at Tiverton, in 1809. Mrs. Piozzi, as is well known, outlived all her contemporaries, and witnessed the popularity of a modern literature of which she had no very high opinion.

As for Della Crusca, he married, in 1791, Miss Brunton, an actress, whose sister became Countess of Craven, and who had played the heroine in his tragedy of *Lorenzo*. His reply to the remonstrances of his aunt on the *mésalliance* shall be quoted, to show that he had his lucid intervals. "She ought," he said, "to be proud that he had brought a woman of such virtue and talents into the family. Her virtue his marrying her proved; and her talents would all be thrown away by taking her off the stage." Nevertheless, he afterwards weakly yielded to his relations, and withdrew her from the stage against her own inclination, thereby depriving himself of a source of income with which, as a gambler and *bon vivant*, he could ill afford to dispense. He accordingly quitted England, and must have betaken himself to France, an adventure which befel him in Paris, in September, 1792, being thus amusingly given by Horace Walpole—

"In the midst of the massacre of Monday last, Mr. Merry, immortalized, not by his verses, but by those of the 'Baviad,' was mistaken for the Abbé Maury, and was going to be hoisted to the lanterne. He cried out that he

was Merry, the poet: the ruffians, who had probably never read the scene in Shakespeare, yet replied, 'Then we will hang you for your bad verses;' but he escaped better than Cinna, I don't know how, and his fright cost him but a few 'gossamery tears,' and I suppose he will be happy to re-cross the 'silky ocean,' and shed dolorous nonsense in rhyme over the woes of this happy country."

But England was not to see much more of Merry; English society was probably not so kind to the radical husband of an actress as it had been to the bachelor of fashion. He withdrew, with his wife, to America, in 1796; and died, three years afterwards, of apoplexy, in his garden at Baltimore.

Merry did not fail to find in his own day apologists of some pretensions to taste. I find in the notes to George Dyer's poem, "The Poet's Fate," published in 1797—which contains early and interesting laudations not only of his school-fellows Lamb and Coleridge, but also of Wordsworth and Southey—the following reference to Merry: "But, after all, though the hero of the 'Baviad' betrayed glitter and negligence—though he misled the taste of some, too much inclined to admire and imitate defects, yet Merry's writings possess poetical merits; and the spirit of liberty and benevolence which breathes through them is ardent and sincere." The criticism may be incorrect, but it is worth noting, because it is the criticism of a contemporary. Had it not been for

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Coleridge's fervently expressed admiration for Bowles's sonnets, which so perplexes critics who do not judge literature from a historical point of view, the world would have continued to sneer at him, with Byron, as "simple Bowles," and to know him only by Byron's line. The fact is, literary history will never be intelligently written till it is studied in the spirit of the naturalist, to whom the tares are as interesting as the wheat. We may, perhaps, give the Della Cruscans, with their desperate strainings after poetic fire and poetic diction, the credit of having done something to shake the supremacy of versified prose ; of having forwarded, however feebly, the poetic emancipation which Wordsworth and Coleridge were to consummate. The false extravagance of Della Crusca may have cleared the way for the truthful extravagance of Keats. It is, I am aware, customary to attribute the regeneration of English poetry to the French Revolution, which "shook up the sources of thought all over Europe," but the critics who use these glib catchwords are in no hurry to point out a concrete chain of logical connection between Paris mobs and sequestered poets. Plain judges will even consider it a far cry from the "Rights of Man" to "Christabel." At all events, Dyer was right in deprecating the savagery of Gifford's satire. The question

"Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?"

will apply to other schools and fashions besides that of the "elegant Cesario's," whom Leigh Hunt designated *par excellence* "as the plague of the butterflies." And here, I think, we touch upon the moral which I promised at the outset.

It is not very long since the country to which Della Crusca ultimately betook himself received to her shores the reputed prophet of Æstheticism, whose career, in other respects, presented remarkable parallels with that of Robert Merry. Each made his political appearance in the columns of a newspaper called the *World*; each professed Republican opinions; each wrote poems not remarkable for truth to nature or sobriety of diction; each represented a school; and the name of each became as a red rag to the Giffords, who played the part of the bull in the china shop. But it is not with this clumsy rage that posterity will regard our follies; nor is it useful, or desirable, that we should now so regard them. It is with a smile of amused anticipation, it is with a bland and philosophic interest, that the antiquary of the future will turn to the pages of *Punch* or the libretto of *Patience*, to read of the Anna Matildas, who lately delighted to apparel themselves in what Bramston called "shape-disguising sacks"—the Della Cruscas who took Postlethwaite for a great poet.

*The National Review*, January, 1885.

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## *Springtime*

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**L** O ! already a fern new-born  
Curls in the hedgerow his mimic horn,  
And the primrose hourly edges aside  
The leafy driftage of wintertide ;  
Far in the vale, where the woods are still,  
Stands a delicate daffodil ;  
Hasting brooks in the prime of the year  
Murmur merrily,—April's here,  
With gentle rains and westerly vanes,  
Buttercup buds and daisy-chains.

Between moist meadow and sunlit sky  
The sad-voiced plover is circling high ;  
Sudden and loud through larch and fir  
Rings the laugh of the woodpecker ;  
And the wagtail flirts his plumage pied  
In snatches of flight by the waterside ;  
Garden voices that late were dumb  
Whistle and warble,—a time will come  
For shade of leaves and pillage of sheaves  
And swallows a-twitter in last year's eaves.

Lo ! she comes, in the old sweet ways,  
The happy April of other days,



Maiden April, merry of mien,  
Trips afield in the meadow green ;  
Sick or sound, or sorry or glad,  
Utter it, echo it, lass and lad,  
Lad and lass in the youth of the year  
Echo it, utter it,—April's here ;  
Then comes May, pleasure and play,  
Holiday-dance and roundelay.

*Cornhill Magazine*, May, 1883.

It was with reference to the foregoing verse  
that Mr. Kent received the following note from  
Mr. James Payn :—

“15, Waterloo Place, S.W.,

“March 13, 1883.

“SIR,

“I hope to be able to use your pretty poem.  
It seems true and fresh and pleasant, and to have ‘the  
true bird-note.’

“JAMES PAYN.”

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## *The Pains of Rhyme*

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**J**OHNSON thought that the reception originally accorded to "Paradise Lost" was not altogether inadequate, considering that it was written in a "style of versification new to all and disgusting to many,"—in the blank verse, namely, which, as he elsewhere said, "seems to be verse only to the eye." The present position of unrhymed decasyllabics is, of course, absolutely secure; the only pity of it being, that so few can write them as they should be written. As regards other rhymeless poetry, it is unlikely that Johnson would have become a convert if he had lived to read the "Thalaba" or "Queen Mab." His opinion of Collins's "Ode to Evening" is not, to our recollection, on record, but the poem has probably jarred on the majority of youthful ears, or left them, at best, unsatisfied. On the whole, in spite of various admirable attempts—and the name of W. E. Henley may, perhaps, occur to some in this connection—the rhymeless lyric would not seem to have advanced one single step in popularity since the days of Johnson.

The fact is in a way deplorable. Not that the delight in rhyme is itself in any way open to

challenge or criticism. No competent reader but loves it, whether it rollicks in burlesque—

“On Friday died he and that tidy lady by his side”—  
or lingers on the ear, as in George Macdonald’s melodious quatrain—

“Many a wrong with its curing song,  
Many a road and many an inn,  
Room to roam, but only one home  
For all the world to win.”

Nevertheless, it is sad to observe how rhymed poetry continues to groan under a disadvantage of long standing, it is true, and long endured, but which every new poem emphasizes and aggravates. Just as Mill foreboded the exhaustion of musical combinations, so in poetry it has really come to pass that self-respecting rhymers can hardly venture to give the emphasis of assonance to the very words which would naturally demand it most. Life, Death, and the World, Joy and Sorrow, the Moon and the Stars, together with many others, fall under this most inconvenient ban. To “bid sorrow borrow from blithe to-morrow” we are nowadays entirely ashamed, and few would now dispute that the terribly flat penultimate line of Blanco White’s sonnet—

“Why do we then shun death *with anxious strife*”—  
is alone enough to nullify Coleridge’s claim for it, that it was the finest in the language. As for

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moon and stars—which, *pace* George Eliot, are intrinsically more beautiful words than “chips” or “sawdust”—the stars immediately suggest to us harbour and other bars, and the moon reminds us of the parodist of the “June” and “River” school of drawing-room balladists :—

“When ‘loon’s’ been used, and ‘shoon,’ and ‘spoon,’  
And ‘stiver’ sounded ‘stiver,’  
Think of a bard reduced to ‘coon’  
And left alone with ‘liver.’”

Mr. Gilbert, it is true, made quite a new man of the loon in this aspect, when—in “Sing me your song, O”—he applied to him the epithet “love-lorn,” but these felicities can only be created once. Mr. Kipling with his “flung festoon” of monkeys “halfway up to the jealous moon” also made a great hit, and this hit also can never be repeated. Fielding’s line—

“A cat in boots did dance a rigadoon”—

occurs in blank verse, but if it had been otherwise he would certainly, and probably justly, have been accused of writing it for the rhyme. Perhaps the oddest thing in this connection was done by Hood when, for the purpose of this same assonance, he called a tree with snaky roots a “Forest Laocoon.”

These lunar difficulties have been always and obviously to the fore—but the same objection could as easily be sustained against any of the

words given above. It is, for instance, very difficult for a "pius vates et Phœbo digna locuturus" to rhyme death and breath without a sense of guilt, and "my son's wife Elizabeth," even if that happens to be her name, is as impossible a personage to him as Betty Foy or "dear brother Tim." He is, therefore, for practical purposes, "left alone with 'saith'"—for the other verbs in -eth sound somewhat affected, except in a neo-mediævalist mouth.

That poets would like, if it were possible, to rhyme with the words of which we speak, is shown by the example of such essential artists as Tennyson, who was continually attempting it with varied success. As regards "moon"—

"My breath to heaven like vapour goes,  
May my soul follow soon"

has the true air of neatness and inevitability—but he could not always do as much with "stars" and "world." His "furled battle-flags" are perhaps his best rhyme to the latter; but what poet can now bring himself to furl even his umbrella with this used-up rhyme in view? The result of all this is, not only that the poet is hampered and trammelled, but that half the reader's pleasure is spoilt. He becomes a sort of composition master, looking out for an "atque" or an "usque" in a schoolboy exercise. It is easy to say that a reader who, when his eye is

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## *The Pains of Rhyme*

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caught by the word "stars" at the end of a sonnet, cannot forbear looking at once to see how the author has circumvented the rhyme, is a reader unduly sophisticated. All it really means is that he has himself gone through the mill of verse-making. If he knew nothing of how poetry is made, he could assuredly be no judge of its beauty or success. It is the same with painting—but with what a difference! The modest dauber may look upon the works of men who repeatedly and triumphantly surmount the difficulties of their art. The man has yet to be born who can make repeated and triumphant rhymes to "moon." In contemplating the miserable paucity and banality of rhymes, we English are condemned to sorrow as they who have no hope. The days of mere alliteration when *Piers Plowman* "shook him into shrouds as he a shep were" are evidently past recall; and the future of the rhymeless lyric seems dark. It would appear that the rhymers of the future will do well to eschew more and more the tell-tale rhymes of which we have been speaking. They must console themselves with the knowledge that poetry of the most magical charm—such lines as—

"And Beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face"—

can be made out of words to which the assonances are fairly plentiful. No reader will trouble himself

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## *Otia—Essays and Reviews*

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to notice what particular rhyme a poet has selected for "sound," and this cause of disenchantment is to that extent removed. All the same, the rhymers are much to be pitied. The poet of "Molly Trefusis" carolled in a most airy and apparently artless way about the Pains of Prose. Nobody can ever have known better than himself the reality of what we have here described as the Pains of Rhyme—nor, for the matter of that, defied them with a better grace.

*Saturday Review*, October 28, 1899.

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## *The Crime of Alexander Pope*

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**A** PART from the affectionate admiration of his genius which every one feels who came early in life under the spell of Pope, there is no practical doubt that he was, to borrow the deathbed words of Scott, "a good man, a kind man." He may have played hocus-pocus with his own correspondence—he may have written about Lady Mary in a manner almost unpardonable even when all allowance is made—he did, as a matter of fact, do both these things—but, in spite of all, we leave it to any candid reader of "Spence's Anecdotes" to judge what manner of man he was. In that book, which, in point of sheer downright literary entertainment, we put immediately second to "Boswell," we get Pope as we do nowhere else, very much in his habit as he lived and across the walnuts and the wine. If we quote the following scrap of dialogue it is not so much because it is more illustrative than others of the nature of the man, but because some stray reader who does not know it may be interested to hear Pope's views upon vivisection. "Yes, Dr. Hales is a very good man, only I am sorry



he has his hands so much imbrued in blood." "What, he cuts up rats?" "Ay, and dogs too! [With what emphasis and concern he spoke it!] He commits most of these barbarities with the thought of being of use to man, but how do we know that we have a right to kill creatures we are so little above as dogs, for our curiosity or even for some use to us?" Nevertheless this poet of genius and sensibility must undoubtedly be accused of crime in that he caused his followers to lay violent hands upon a "noble and a national metre." His followers walking in that way of "smoothness" which Pope enjoined upon them, so trivialized and debased the couplet that they left it for dead—and dead it seemed to be for many a generation after Pope's death. Even now when it is seen again among us there are some who seem to look upon the couplet as a merely undesirable and revisitant ghost.

We have borrowed the words "a noble and a national metre" from the first of twelve charming essays which Dr. Garnett has lately collected in a volume.\* Readers who care for "books about books" (and, for such readers, what can be a more alluring title than "Shelley and Lord Beaconsfield"?) will be spontaneously anxious to read Dr. Garnett, but, in the mean time, instead of trying to deal with his essays seriatim in a

\* "Essays of an Ex-Librarian." By Richard Garnett. London : Heinemann. 1901.

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## *The Crime of Alexander Pope*

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formal review, we may perhaps be allowed to dwell for a moment upon the misdeed of Alexander Pope.

There often floats across our memory one signal and crucial example of the evil which Pope did—and which lived after him. It is an example which many a reader may have noticed for himself, but which we have not seen enlarged upon in print. We refer to Gilbert White's "Naturalist's Summer Evening Walk." In that poem we get from White, eternally and infallibly faithful to the nature which he knew and loved, a mass of detail as true to life as it is false in expression. The timid hare limping out to feed—the wood-lark hovering and singing unseen—the owl silently skirting the meadow—everything is "*vu et senti*," and indeed so justly high is White's reputation for accuracy, that when we find him writing in his Popian jargon—

"Or the soft quail his tender pain relate"—

we know that he is taking no poetic license, and that we may probably infer with safety that the note of the quail was a more common sound at Selborne than we presume it is to-day. And then after all this wealth, this true wealth, of love and knowledge how does White proceed to express the emotion aroused?

"As Fancy warms, a pleasing kind of pain  
Steals o'er the cheek and thrills the creeping vein."

People who happen to have been gifted with this particular form of sensibility will recognize that White describes it here with an almost clinical accuracy ; but, on the other hand, the verbal falsetto in respect both of the scenery and the emotions it produced is so disenchanting that, if the poem had not been familiarized to us in youth as the work of White, it might easily have continued to be of all those readable pages the only page unread. When Pepys tells us that certain music made him feel as he used to do when he was first in love with Mrs. Pepys we find no difficulty in accepting his statement. We must lay it to the charge of Pope that when White tries to tell us the effect produced upon him by his evening walk we have to think twice and fall back upon our knowledge of him as a true and great naturalist in order that we may not pass him by as a pretentious poetaster.

It is not uninteresting to note in White's poem some little indications of what we may call the Wartonian movement. "What time" and "adown the vale" seem to be heralding the romantic reaction ; nor is the metre of the poem, though written only twenty-five years after Pope's death, entirely after Pope's pattern, but he remains responsible for the worst of its falsetto. It is the contention of Macaulay that poets before Pope would have given their ears to write like him, only they had not found out the dodge. Dryden is

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## *The Crime of Alexander Pope*

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enough to disprove this. If Dryden could write not one but many Popian couplets, such as—

“The new-come guest admires the ethereal state,  
The sapphire portal and the golden gate”—

it is absurd to suppose that so great a craftsman could not have repeated this pattern *ad nauseam*. Happily he knew better than to relinquish those triplets of which Leigh Hunt so charmingly said that he liked the very side-bracket that marked them out because it had “a look like the bridge of a lute”—still less those Alexandrines which “enable a poet to finish his impulse with triumph.” But, indeed, the Popian line is to be found scattered in all previous poetry.

“And by that fire which burn’d the Carthage queen  
When the false Trojan under sail was seen.”

Shakespeare could no doubt have hammered out twenty more of such lines running, but, being a poet, it would not have occurred to him to do it. For, in truth, the eighteenth-century difficulty came to be, not so much that “every warbler had his tune by heart,” as that what they warbled was really no tune at all. Of course Pope himself was not on the low level of his disciples. Another Shakespearean line, for instance—

“To suckle fools and chronicle small beer”—

might easily have been written by Pope, and is,

indeed, in his very best manner. The quarrel of the poetical world with Pope has been that he exerted so baleful an influence on others.

Gray, as Mr. Gosse has remarked, was one of the few who remained faithful to the Dryden model in an early translation of Statius—

“Third in the labours of the disc came on  
With sturdy step and slow Hippomedon,” etc. ;

but for the most part nothing could be done in the metre for some seventy years, except a few outbursts of that stumping and stamping rhetoric which was all that Pope had left it fit for. But let us not exaggerate. In “The Vanity of Human Wishes”—and, as Mr. Birrell says, “if this be not poetry may the name perish !”—or in “Lines to my Mother’s Picture”—the genius of a Johnson or a Cowper does, undoubtedly, from beneath all that rubbish-heap of other men’s couplets, burst out and blaze through. Nor can we forget Goldsmith or Crabbe ; but Edward FitzGerald would have had less difficulty in popularizing his pet poet if Crabbe had not inherited the tradition of Pope.

The early years of the last century found the couplet still, as one may say, hibernating, and the first to try to revivify it was Leigh Hunt. Surely neither as poet nor, more especially, as critic has he ever been properly esteemed. Leigh Hunt was himself in early years under the obsession of

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Pope, and used to write, as he tells us in his autobiography, quantities of couplets of this kind :

“ Mantua, of every age the long renown  
That now a Virgil giv’st and now a gown.”

Probably Hunt’s efforts in “The Story of Rimini” to make a return to the ease and flexibility of Dryden might have attracted more attention if he had not been so much outshone by his contemporaries, and amongst them by Keats, who was looked upon as his acolyte—it was Hunt who “first puffed the youth into notice in his newspaper.” Unhappily Keats, sharing Hunt’s weariness of sing-song, went in “Endymion” to a ludicrously opposite extreme. As Hunt remarked, whereas Dryden had modestly admitted the suggestion of thoughts by rhymes, “Mr. Keats, in the tyranny of his wealth, forced his rhymes to help him, whether they would or not ; and they obeyed him, in the most singular manner, with equal promptitude and ungainliness.” It was certainly an amazing revulsion—there may be some who hardly realize that “Endymion” and the “Essay on Man” are technically in the same metre—and must probably have tended to put his brother poets yet more out of conceit with decasyllabics. Still they most of them wrote the metre occasionally, notably Byron, who, of course, defiantly adopted the old sing-song exactly as he found it.

And now as to the future of this noble and national metre, as natural to us as their Alexandrines to the French? That it can ever cease to be written we do not believe. Leigh Hunt was of opinion, and so is Dr. Garnett, that Pope made a great error practically in discarding triplets, Alexandrines and (a point more doubtful) double rhymes, and we imagine that to be the best modern opinion. That the point is not essential is shown amongst other poets by Herrick, who, without having recourse to these metrical effects, handles the couplet with even more than his usual feeling and flexibility. In the mean time the couplet is not dead, as some suppose—it is difficult to think of any past poets down to the times of Morris and Swinburne who have not at some time used it, and we get to-day such rhythmical experimenters as Mr. Symons, one of the naturalizers in English of the French Alexandrine, working the couplet into new forms and melodies. It must take its future shape at the hands of each of its future writers, but we agree with Dr. Garnett that in depriving themselves of triplets and Alexandrines they will gain less than nothing. Pope did in that respect for Dryden very much what was done for the pentameter by Ovid, who, in denuding it of polysyllabic endings, left it, in our opinion, a comparatively mean and unmusical thing.

*Saturday Review*, January 18, 1902.

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## *The Battle of the Scansionists\**

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**T**O say that English metre is a subject from which all who are not conversant with it may as well be warned off may seem to savour of the counsel that nobody should bathe till he can swim—all we mean is that they will find the study dull enough who do not bring to it from their school and college reading a fair stock of ideas on the questions at issue, and in all likelihood not a few prepossessions. Those who have in their time enjoyed manufacturing verses in Latin and English will find much enjoyment here. To others the problems will seem even exasperatingly academic—for it is not pretended that the ear of good poets has not been able to solve nearly all the difficulties for itself, the exception being that of classic metres in English, of which more anon.

Mr. Mayor's book is a most handy historic summary of the whole subject and of the different

\* "Chapters on English Metre," by Joseph B. Mayor. Second edition, revised. Cambridge: At the University Press. 1901. "Milton's Prosody," by Robert Bridges. "Classical Metres in English Verse," by W. J. Stone. One vol. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press. 1901.



theories held, beginning with that of Dr. Guest, who took up an absurd position of allegiance to Anglo-Saxon alliteration, and maintained that all subsequent deviations had been in the nature of a decadence. One of Milton's crimes, according to Dr. Guest, was that he made "wide-encroaching" furnish the end of one line and the beginning of the next. "Of this gross fault Milton has been guilty more than once"! The fact is that Dr. Guest, living and writing as he did in two centuries, retained in addition to his Anglo-Saxon craze all the limitations of the eighteenth. "When we see how nearly the freedom of our elder poets approached to license, we may appreciate in some measure the obligations we are under to the school of Pope and Dryden. The attempts to revive the abuses which they reformed have happily as yet met with only partial success." He rails, in fact, at the metrical phenomena which he ought to explain, while Dr. Bridges has found in Milton the very norm of the melodious.

Simple as the matter might seem, the eternal crux of a metrical systematist is to find some scheme by which he can label words as being in such and such a metre. In Latin it is easy—this we say might be a pentameter ending and that the beginning of an hexameter—though indeed if we had remaining to us only such things as—

"Hymen O Hymenæe Io Hymen O Hymenæe"—

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or—

“Vale vale inquit Iolla”—

we should have been in the same difficulty that we now find in English. Take the line—

“This day had been cheerful and cold, but now”—

a reader who does not know it is quite likely to read it as if it ran like—

“A sensitive plant in a garden grew”—

whereas, it is really among the heroic couplets of “Julian and Maddalo.” We cannot be said to have advanced far while such confusions are legitimately possible. Conversely no one who first saw them isolated would think of reading these two lines from the “Sensitive Plant”—

“To shield the glow-worm from the evening dew;”

“The dark grass and the flowers among the grass”—

otherwise than as ten-syllable iambs. In Shelley’s case his curious fondness for what seem to be unmusical anapæsts may have something to say in the matter; but take a phrase of Tennyson—

“Men of Bideford in Devon.”

This might be trochaic, like “Art thou weary, art thou languid,” if the metrical context did not show us that it is meant to be read anapæstically. Now, unless we can find some way out of this, English prosody perishes. A metrical scheme

which fails to inform us in what metre detached decasyllabic lines are written is really no scheme at all. Consider what it means. When we read the Greek of "evil communications," etc., we know that S. Paul is quoting us an iambic fragment—but we challenge denial of the fact that if the only two surviving lines out of the "Sensitive Plant" were those quoted about the glow-worm and the grass, a man who should assert that the poem could have been written in anything but rhymed or unrhymed heroics would have been held much less worth answering than Mrs. Gallup.

Contrast with this chaotic incertitude the genuine metrical systems which can sometimes be made to support some pretty little piece of deduction such as the following: A well-known Cambridge scholar came one day in Aristotle upon this phrase—*διὸ εὐρηκέναι νεῖκος ὅτι ὁ ἐρώμενος τοιαῦτα ἂν οὐκ ἐρῶν λέγοι*. Observing in his perplexity that the last words were an iambic line, he conjecturally emended it thus—*διὸ εἴρηκεν Ἄνεικος ὅτι ὁ—*

Ἐρώμενος τοιαῦτ' ἂν, κ.τ.λ.,

and had the satisfaction of finding that there really was an obscure Greek poet called Aneicus of whom he had never heard. On the other hand, once isolate the line—

"To shield the glow-worm from the evening dew,"

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and it will lead the student of two thousand years hence to nothing unless to the conclusion that the "Sensitive Plant" and the "Botanic Garden" were in the same metre, and perhaps to some beautiful theory that Erasmus Darwin wrote them both. It will not avail to say that to give a scansionist only one line is like asking him to identify a large animal from a little splinter of bone. This might be true of "Alexander's Feast," but if prosody is to be more than utterly embryonic, the lines of the "Sensitive Plant" must clearly be like apples on a tree, differing often widely from each other, but still apples. In the case of the lines quoted above, our metrical botanists could not tell us whether they were apples or oranges.

The schemes which scansionists provide resolve themselves practically into two—stress prosody and scansion by classical feet. Stress prosody must be allowed to be rather a vague classifier when lines of equal length can have either, say, eight stresses, as in Milton's—

"Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of  
Death,"

or rather less than two and a half, as in Wycherley's—

"Inhospitable hospitality"—

the only decasyllabic line, by the way, that we

have come across made up of two words. To show the incertitude of this method, we incline to think that the line has only two stresses, but we are sure some would disagree. Nor will stress prosody help us to the scansion of such things as "Men of Bideford in Devon," which has three stresses or two, according as we read it like "Men of Harlech," or like "To the moaning and the groaning" of the bells. In all this there is no note of ingratitude for treatises of great literary interest and curiosity, such as this of Dr. Bridges, which has been already before the world. Not only has his industry given us a captivating synopsis of Milton's types of rhythm, but in things of real difficulty, such as the choruses in "Samson," the most advanced amateur of the subject will be glad of the guidance of one who is himself not only a scholar but a poet. As to scansion by classical feet, we look upon it as a vague but convenient method of indication, which those who have learnt it would be loth to lose. For English children, no doubt "rising" and "falling" are more convenient terms than iambic and trochaic, otherwise, taking the line from "Anactoria"—

"Intolerable interludes and infinite ill"—

it seems to us a matter of indifference whether we say that it has so many stresses, or cut it up into iambs, tribrachs, etc., but at all events that can

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only be a very tentative scheme which makes such a word as "interludes" the equivalent of the classic dactyl.

Dr. Bridges has appended to this edition of his book a most striking essay on classic metres in English by the late Mr. Stone. Mr. Stone believed with Tennyson that every English syllable had its own proper quantity—but we shall put his view most succinctly by quoting his pet pentameter—

"Now with mighty vessels loaded a lordly river."  
(Clough.)

We may point out that the fact that in English a doubled consonant after a vowel (as in "vessels") makes it not only not long but invariably short was insisted upon as far back as 1774 by Greek-history Mitford, whose essay on "The Harmony of Language" is well worth consulting on the whole subject of metre in English. Reverting to Clough's pentameter, the main point to note is that in "vessels" and "river" accent combats quantity, thus saving us from the monotonous and even absurd pentameter of what we call the "Dickory dickory dock" pattern. Calverley was the first to see that Anglo-Latin verse which habitually "reads itself" is radically wrong, and that consequently Tennyson's alcaic ending "Charm as a wanderer out in Ocean" was as bad as would be "*foeda cadavera barbarorum*."

The same canon applies to Coleridge's pentameter "falling in melody back." It is, by the way, odd that Mr. Stone no less than Calverley seems to have overlooked the pentameter in a well-known poem of Catullus—

"Aut facere : hæc a te dictaque factaque sunt"—

a perhaps unique exception which strikingly emphasizes the rule. In "arma virumque cano" it is only the small boy who pronounces "cano" with the same accent as he would "away"—just as Ruskin in the nursery persisted in italicizing the "of" in the line—

"The ashes of the urn."

This last illustration incidentally refutes by analogy those who might perversely allege that there is no certainty that the ancients did not "jump" their rhythms after this fashion. In fine, if, said Mr. Stone, English really has quantity—if English really has accent—may we not hope to write classic metres after the model of Clough's "lordly river," or his hexameter "Boughs with apples laden," etc., taking care, as the ancients did, that accent mostly antagonizes quantity? We welcome the hopeful affirmative of Dr. Bridges. As regards the pentameter, we shall, we think, in that case have to go back to the polysyllabic endings of Propertius and the Greeks. Mr. Robinson Ellis, of whose Catullus in the original

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metres we have been rather surprised to find no mention here, adopting as he did the "Dickory dickory dock" principle, wrote in consequence no good pentameters except a few ending in such words as "denizen" or "dolorous." "Let the reader," says Dr. Bridges, "question his ear what it was that Ovid sought after when he ruled that his pentameters should close with a dissyllable." Having always contended that Ovid in so ruling greatly injured the metre, we should be glad if Dr. Bridges would enlarge upon his *obiter dictum*, since we are not sure whether we catch his drift. Space, however, fails us for these ramifying minutiae, and we will end by giving what publicity we can to an inquiry of Mr. Mayor's about Goldsmith, who wrote, it appears, in 1760 that "we have seen several late specimens of English hexameters and sapphics so happily composed that by attaching to them the idea of ancient measure we found them in all respects as melodious and agreeable to the ear as the works of Virgil and Anacreon or Horace." Mr. Mayor does not know to what this refers, and neither do we, but perhaps some chance reader of this page may be more fortunate.

*Saturday Review*, April 12, 1902.



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## *An Old-World Welcome*

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**B**URN, against Corinna come,  
Ambergris and galbanum,  
And fetch to welcome her withal  
The viol and the virginal.

For a strewing bid there be  
Marjoram and rosemary,  
And three-score opals wisely set  
In a birthday carcanet.

Put before her cream and wine,  
Syllabubs and muscadine,  
Honey from the heather-bells,  
Bergamots and jargonels.

Till that sleep her eyes have kissed,  
Love shall be our lutanist,  
And spread for me, and spread for her,  
Coverlets of gossamer.

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## *Epigrams of the Earth*\*

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**I**T was said of Silius Italicus that he was the patron of the genitive case, and a scholiast of the future might conceivably say of Mr. Meredith that he was the patron of colons and semi-colons. To some extent this is a mere trick of punctuation, and dashes would answer the purpose equally well ; but that does not affect the main point, that a poet whose phrases lie naturally between stops of this kind may be forcible, graphic, ingenious—but will most certainly be jerky. The English have been jerked and jolted by many of their singers ; but the process does not in the long run seem to command what Leigh Hunt called “the general consent and delight of poetic readers,” and it may therefore be doubted whether these poems will hereafter receive the elucidation for which many of them cry aloud.

In the quotation which follows it may be well to premise, by way of key, that the poet is in course of arguing that the Earth, who apparently brings forth the heroic virtues only to destroy them, is not really so unnatural a mother as

\* “Poems,” by George Meredith. 2 vols. London : Constable, 1898.

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## *Otia—Essays and Reviews*

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she seems—"she reaps them as the sower reaps."

"The sighting brain her good decree  
Accepts ; obeys those guides, in faith,  
By reason hourly fed, that she,  
To some the clod, to some the wraith,

Is more, no mask ; a flame, a stream.  
Flame, stream, are we, in mid career  
From torrent source, delirious dream,  
To heaven-reflecting currents clear,

And why the sons of strength have been  
Her cherished offspring ever ; how  
The Spirit served by her is seen  
Through Law ; perusing love will show.

Love born of Knowledge, love that gains  
Vitality as Earth it mates,  
The meanings of the Pleasures, Pains,  
The Life, the Death, illuminates."

That is gnomic poetry as made—not, surely, without honest toil—in modern England, and will not ring unfamiliarly in a modern ear. These halting parentheses, these hurried reservations, these huddling metaphors, make us aware that we are sitting under "a pious and painful preacher," but we go away wondering whether some of those who

"could in one couplet fix  
More sense than we can do in six,"

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## *Epigrams of the Earth*

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might not have said the same thing in a less contorted way.

Many of these poems are attempts to record the vague moods engendered in man by the Earth and the Earth's weather. Very full of force and feeling they mostly are; but a reader's estimate of their real success will depend upon how far he finds himself in sympathy with what we have just said.

“Interpret me the savage whirr :  
And is it Nature scourged, or she,  
Her offspring's executioner,  
Reducing land to barren sea ?”

“Interpret me the savage whirr.” It is a petition which will often rise to the lips of Mr. Meredith's readers. The poem just quoted begins—

“Bursts from a rending East in flaws  
The young green leaflets harrier, sworn  
To strew the garden,” etc.

Must a reader really be, to quote one of Mr. Meredith's dark phrases, “a man of oaken head,” if he hesitates for a second whether to take “bursts” as a noun or a verb, or if the “harrier” makes him think for another second of Mr. Swinburne's “hounds of spring”? But Humpty Dumpty was not a greater autocrat with words than Mr. Meredith. A river with reflections in

it is a "reflective river." "Sprays that paw the naked bush," are the sprays that stick out from it and look like hands; a foxcub is "dappled" and a goad "toothsome."

Mr. Meredith, to leave for a moment the question of technique, is not the first public entertainer who has dropped the strings of his puppets to enter the confessional of lyric poetry, and the disclosure he here makes to the world of his personal beliefs is very definite and very interesting. He seems to be a complete Tellurist or Earth-worshipper; for, although the Earth is spoken of in one passage as the handmaiden of the Over-reason, she is practically the only Divinity accessible to man. Man is "Earth's great venture," and "his cry to Heaven is a cry to her." Man's sacred books are to her "the Legends;" his schemes of future existence are "fables of the Above;" and to any questionings about the Whence and the Whither she is obstinately deaf. At the same time, she views with sympathy man's inventions of law and language, and the architecture in which he "sings his soul in stone," and rejoices to see him beautify her waste places with "gold harvest-robcs and mural crown." Melampus, with his minute study of the smallest of the "motioned wits" which "strive through antlered moss-work," was an example of the wisdom which comes of mere poring upon the book of Earth. Shakespeare

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## *Epigrams of the Earth*

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had his greatness at the hands of the same Divinity. "He knew thee, Mother Earth," and,

"Thence had he the laugh  
We feel is thine, broad as ten thousand beeves  
At pasture !"

The metaphor is characteristic. The Earth-poet thinks of humanity chiefly in terms of crops ; and "we drop for crop" is the response echoed by the trees to the axe of the woodman. The Earth, for whom, after all, the "Nature" of the poets is only another name, is not in reality cruel, and were Shakespeare living he would overwhelm with laughter

"that little twist of brain  
Which moved some weighty leader of the blind  
Unwitting 'twas the goad of personal pain,  
To view in curst eclipse our Mother's mind,  
And show us of some rigid harridan  
The wretched bondmen till the end of time."

Our Mother Earth thus reinstated in her old position as *justissima Tellus*, the duty of her children is to "plod in the track of the husbandman"—in the sweat of their brow, literally and otherwise, to eat bread—to "live in their offspring as she lives in hers"—and to forward the supremacy of brains.

"Her children of the labouring brain,  
These are the champions of the race,  
True parents, and the sole humane,  
With understanding for their base."

This optimism is a refreshing novelty in the verse of the century, and calculated to foster what Stevenson called "bracing, manly virtues." Stevenson himself, though not a formal votary of this religion, was imbued, as his letters bear witness, with much of its spirit when he cleared the jungle in Samoa.

In the sonnet entitled "An Orson of the Muse" it seems probable that Mr. Meredith intended to portray himself—a scorner of the "Muse's livery" and her "measured courtly paces." We must find space to quote from "The Lark Ascending" a passage of sustained and over-running loveliness, in which the poet gloriously belies his own advocacy and practice of the uncouth :—

"For all to hear and all to know  
That he is joy, awake, aglow,  
The tumult of the heart to hear  
Through pureness filtered crystal-clear,  
And know the pleasure sprinkled bright  
By simple singing of delight,  
Shrill, irreflective, unrestrained,  
Rapt, ringing, on the jet sustained  
Without a break, without a fall,  
Sweet-silvery, sheer lyrical,  
Perennial, quavering up the chord  
Like myriad dews of sunny sward  
That trembling into fulness shine  
And sparkle dropping argentine."

Why a poet who could devise these beautiful

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## *Epigrams of the Earth*

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and "artful numbers," and could elaborate the captivating and, we believe, original metrical effects in "Phœbus with Admetus," should be capable of so much that is untuneable and ugly, seems to pass understanding, nor is the wonder lessened by the fact that Mr. Meredith has not been our only Orson. We can but regret that the Orsonic Muse should so often remind us of the sentence quoted by Matthew Arnold—"Condamnée à être l'effroi du monde dont elle pourrait être l'amour."

*Saturday Review*, February 18, 1899.



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*Interea*

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**L**OVE me, ere the pallid moon  
Rise upon the afternoon,  
Ere our hearts forget their tune,  
Love me soon !

Age is on us unaware,  
Age is come and will not spare.  
Lo ! his finger on my hair.  
Love is—where ?

Love me while the Fates allow,  
Death's our nearer neighbour now—  
Death with darkness on his brow—  
Love me now !

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## *An Exotic Poet\**

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**P**ROBABLY most of those who care to read reviews of poets will remember Taine's eloquent peroration to his history of our literature, and the elaborate comparison there made of Tennyson with De Musset. From Tennyson making himself happy in a "house full of books, in a garden of flowers"—the critic does not say ingloriously happy, but that is more or less what he means—his fancy transports us to Paris. He shows us his own Parisians sitting round little marble tables in a pandemonium of noise and glare, the dust of the boulevard settling on the very ices which they eat. And thereafter, perhaps in the grey Parisian dawn, is enacted some tragedy, as that of De Musset's *Rolla*. Taine, eying the feverous city, and thinking of the poet, whose daily walk it was, admits that the comfortable kind of people who listened to Tennyson might be worthier folks in a way than his own bourgeois and bohemians; but when it came to poetry, give him Alfred de Musset.

\* "Poems," by Arthur Symonds. 2 vols. London: Heinemann, 1902.

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## *Otia—Essays and Reviews*

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We have had, and still have, among us poets—exotic poets, as we may call them—who share the predilections of Taine, and perhaps it may be said that of such is Mr. Symons. As he put it in a stanza, which he has not here reprinted—

“Seek her not there ; but go where cities pour  
Their turbid human stream through street and mart,  
A dark stream flowing onward evermore  
Down to an unknown ocean ; there is Art.”

Or as we read in these volumes—

“My Paris is a land where twilight days  
Merge into violent nights of black and gold,  
Where it may be the flower of dawn is cold ;  
Ah, but the gold nights and the scented ways !”

And then, after the fierce midnights and famishing morrows, we get the not uncusomary sequel of pietistic frenzy. “I have prayed to God,” says one of these souls in the balance—

“I have prayed to Him, He has heard ;  
But He has not answered a word ;  
My soul walks robed in white among lilies and palms,  
And she hears the triumphing psalms ;  
But louder than all, by day and by night, she hears  
The dogs’ yelp in her ears ;  
And I know that my soul one day shall lie at their feet,  
And my soul be these dogs’ meat.”

It does not take much discernment to see the power and the poetry of verse like this, and it is

in no special spirit of flippancy that we think of Lord Reggie in "The Green Carnation." "Sometimes I like to sit at home after dinner and read the 'Dream of Gerontius.' I love lentils and cold water. At other times I must drink absinthe and hang the night hours with scarlet embroideries." Nevertheless, there comes to be a great sameness in the perpetual ringing of these two changes. These flowers of evil and of remorse have been previously and elsewhere on view, and we cannot think it altogether beside the mark to point out that they are hothouse exotics. Mr. Symons has complained—and up to a point we quite sympathize—that critics, when they are offered a rose, complain that it is not a violet; but, on the other hand, if, as M. Zola said, and as Mr. Symons seems to agree, art is life seen through a temperament, it becomes of interest to determine what the temperament is, and of importance to consider whether we find it congenial. There are undoubtedly passages here which even latitudinarian critics may find quite the reverse. Prudery is always trying to goad and disgust thinking Englishmen into a blank denial that any such thing as impropriety exists at all; and as for the word "improper," prudery has made it almost too ridiculous to use in print, and yet, short of exaggeration, we do not know what other epithet to apply to the opening lines of such a poem as "The Rapture." In the eighteenth-century

phraseology, it is not "proper in a poet" to write thus. Even Ovid (when he wrote in the first person) stopped short with a "*cetera quis nescit?*" Erotic reminiscence in the first person is a form of kissing and telling which good poetry has for the most part avoided. One thinks of Rossetti, but then—well, Rossetti was Rossetti—and the famous nuptial sonnet was, at all events, impersonal in form. As for the peasant lovers of early Scotch song, their *naïveté* saves them from reproach. It seems odd that a mere question of grammatical person should make all the difference—we only say that to our thinking it does.

To a French ear our poetry often seems overloaded with ornament and detail—in the topsyturvy phrase of the ancients "frigid"—or, as Dr. Garnett has it, "an assemblage of purple patches upon a core of perishable wood—the very definition of a scarecrow." Conversely, French verse often seems to us thin, threadbare, and merely rhetorical. We are made spectators of the moods of the mind, and seldom of any definite images which may put us back into touch with our daily life.

To a Frenchman this way of talking would seem quite ludicrously materialistic. Nevertheless, whether or not it is the proper business of poets to "number the streaks of the tulip," it is what our English poets have been doing for us from the immemorial. In England we hear one poet

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## *An Exotic Poet*

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saying, "I know him, February's thrush," and another, "It is the Lesser Celandine"—whereas in French verse we have mostly to be content with the vague abstractions birds and flowers. And so naturally enough in the Gallic verse of Mr. Symons we get little of that minute handling of outward things of which detached passages show that he is very far from incapable.

"Cool little quiet shadows wander out  
Across the fields, and dapple with dark trails  
The snake-grey road coiled stealthily about  
The green hill climbing from the vales."

That landscape (from Arques) is surely very vivid, and it does not stand alone. Beyond love and landscape (mostly of the vaporous nocturne order) Mr. Symons has the third theme of beggars and vagrants, and his writing about them is often true and touching. But on the whole, the despairful monotony of this book and the limitation of its outlook would be almost too much for us if it were not for the poet's mastery of metre, which is to our thinking so great that it is difficult not to read any of these poems through to the end. We said something of this in connection with Mr. Symons's last volume, and also of his introduction of the French Alexandrine, and we may add that we ventured on that occasion to remind the poet that "*Mater Lilium*" was not Latin for "Mother of Lilies." In re-writing the word he has

contrived, oddly enough, to be wrong again, yet—for a man may fail in grammar twice and the third time may prosper—we look forward hopefully to his next edition.

The poem which we shall end by quoting, is not, we think, specially characteristic of Mr. Symons's individual metric gift. We quote it just because it appealed to us as a flawless piece of writing :—

“ A little hand is knocking at my heart,  
And I have closed the door.  
‘ I pray thee, for the love of God, depart :  
Thou shalt come in no more.’

‘ Open, for I am weary of the way.  
The night is very black.  
I have been wandering many a night and day.  
Open. I have come back.’

The little hand is knocking patiently ;  
I listen, dumb with pain.  
‘ Wilt thou not open any more to me ?  
I have come back again.’

‘ I will not open any more. Depart.  
I, that once lived, am dead.’  
The hand that had been knocking at my heart  
Was still. ‘ And I ? ’ she said.

There is no sound save in the winter air  
The sound of wind and rain.  
All that I loved in all the world stands there,  
And will not knock again.”

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## *An Exotic Poet*

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We wonder whether that will affect our readers as it did us. If Mr. Symons knew but one-half how much we were moved by the pathos of these lines, he would not only forgive us for demanding violets when he gives us tiger-lilies, but would join us in the reflection, that as with poets, so with their occasionally unsympathetic critics, there is much in the homely wisdom of the populace that "it takes all sorts to make a world."

*Saturday Review*, February 1, 1902.



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## *Song*

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**I** F there be a garden plot  
Green with heavenly dews,  
Where the flowers that Spring begot  
Winter still renews ;  
Where an easy clutch may win  
Wealth of rose and jessamine ;  
Make me as a path therein  
For thy feet to choose !

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## *Professor Raleigh on Milton\**

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**B**EFORE proceeding to say how much we admire this notable piece of criticism, we may refer to one or two little points as to which we find ourselves out of sympathy. We are heartily sick, for one thing, of the current fashion of sneering at the "Idylls of the King." If Milton, as he thought of doing, had dealt with the Arthur legends, "one thing," says Professor Raleigh, "is certain; he would have set up the warrior King as a perfectly objective figure, hampered by no allegory, and with no inward and spiritual signification." We have not the slightest idea how Professor Raleigh is certain of this, and we entirely disbelieve it, but it is a thesis which we might have patiently borne to see developed by his own originality. What we fear is that the passage will prove a most unseasonable encouragement to the mere parrots who are always prating that King Arthur was too much like a "modern gentleman," and did not stain his limbs with

\* "Milton," by Walter Raleigh. London: Edward Arnold. 1900.

woad, or eat the bag-puddings of his day, or whatever it is they wish him to have done. Who in his senses can believe that any English poet could have given us an "objectively" real King Arthur? These people know as well as we do that Tennyson's allegory will not bite them—we heartily wish it would. And, apart from this crying for the moon of an objective Arthur, their point of view is that of schoolgirls who want to know, not whether the book is well written, but "what the hero is like." As if it had been found, when we think over the great epics of the world, to matter one—parrot cry! As for Æneas, we all know that he had about as much character as Tomlinson; and if Tennyson's hero was a prig, Milton's hero, as Professor Raleigh agrees, was the Devil himself—a grand hero no doubt, but even in his grandeur not the whole making of "Paradise Lost." The author allusively remarks: "Truly, Adam might boast, like Gibbon, that he fell by a noble hand," and the pages in which the nobility of Satan's character is worked out are among the most effective in the book.

We turn to the ornate passage in which the author glorifies Rochester and Sedley as love-poets at the expense of the Puritanic Milton. "The wind bloweth where it listeth; the wandering fire of song touches the hearts and lips of whom it will. Milton built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a great trench about

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## Professor Raleigh on Milton

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the altar, and he put the wood in order, and loaded the altar with rich exotic offerings, cassia and nard, odorous gums and balm, and fruit burnished with golden rind. But the fire from heaven descended on the hastily piled altars of the sons of Belial, and left Milton's gorgeous altar cold." We think this is a little hard on Milton, who, considering his married unhappiness, and the fact that his theme kept him to a great extent on the stilts of the unreal—"not all the dignity of Adam, nor all the beauty of Eve, can make us forget that they are nut-eaters, and they have not the art of cooking, and do not ferment the juice of the grape"—has, nevertheless, left us not only the fine eulogy of a woman's wit and beauty here quoted from the Eighth Book, but also the very human touch in the picture of the citizen forth issuing on a summer's morn—

"If chance with nymph-like step fair virgin pass,  
What pleasing seemed for her now pleases more,  
She most, and in her look sums all delight."

That is the feeling of an amorist at large rather than of the builder of a Puritanic altar; but, turning to the sons of Belial, we are surprised and amused to find Professor Raleigh quoting, to show how hallowed a fire touched the altar of Sedley, a passage which we long ago put by in memory as a very *locus classicus* of Restoration cynicism in regard to woman:—

“All that in woman is ador’d  
In thy dear self I find,  
For the whole sex can but afford  
The handsome and the kind.”

All that Sir Charles, in fact, wanted of a woman—and it was all that he asked, because he thought it was all there was to be got—was just that she should be good looking and no prude. This is what he plainly means and plainly says, though the fluency of the slightly obsolete verse—for we do not now use “kind” in what was then a technical sense—may have caused it to trip undetected past the ear of many a more romantic lover. We can make our meaning absolutely clear to readers of “Middlemarch” by saying that if there was something in Milton of Mr. Casaubon, there was uncommonly little of Dorothea Brooke in the ideal mistresses of the sons of Belial. Dorothea, one thinks, would have been happier with Milton than with Sedley. In the case of writers of any accomplishment, it is difficult to gauge the feeling that underlies their love poetry. It might have been difficult, for instance, in the case of Herrick, if he had left us only such things as the lines to Perilla or the “Night-piece to Julia.”

For the rest, this book is full enough of brilliant things to furnish forth a common criticaster for years; and much of the criticism is of that exceptional order which gives the impression

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## *Professor Raleigh on Milton*

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that its conclusions are at once obviously true and seldom set forth. How good, for example, is this: "One of the chief results of modern historical labour and research has been that it has peopled the Middle Ages for us, and interposed a whole society of living men, our ancestors, between us and ancient Rome. But in Milton's time this process was only beginning." This merit of illuminating truth, obvious but neglected, is well seen in the account here given of Milton's influence on subsequent poetry. It has been usual to think of him as a star that dwelt apart, not only in a moral, but in a literary sense, and to say that he founded no school of his own; yet nothing can be more certain, when once pointed out, than the tyranny that the Miltonic diction exercised not only over direct blank-verse descendants, such as Thomson, but also over rhyme-writers such as Pope and Gray. Some well-chosen instances are given here, and a reader may easily collect others for himself. And again, of direct aping of the "Philips' Cyder" type, what a quantity, when one comes to think of it, there was! "Miltonic cadences became a kind of patter, and the diction that Milton had invented for the rendering of his colossal imaginations was applied indifferently to all subjects—to apple growing, sugar boiling, the drainage of the Bedford level, the breeding of negroes, and the distempers of sheep." We think the claim—if claim it can be called—here made

for Milton, that he was the originator of the eighteenth-century diction against which Wordsworth revolted, admits, speaking generally, of no dispute. Poetic diction of a very analogous kind may no doubt be found in Shakespeare, in Vergil, or, for the matter of that, in Æschylus, but Milton certainly does seem to have popularized a particular form of stilt-walking among those who, like Charles Reade's Triplet, "shoved their pen under the thought" and lifted it by periphrasis to the true level of poetry. The instance given by the author is Thomson's use of the "feathered nations" and "the glossy kind" as a periphrasis for birds—and he amusingly adds that only the context forbids us to think of Red Indians or moles. In bidding us look upon Adam studying against the cold—

"How we his gathered beams  
Reflected may with matter sere foment,  
Or by collision of two bodies grind  
The air attrite to fire"—

he proves by a single quotation what would perhaps have needed no proving if Johnson's dislike of Milton and of blank verse both had not led him to bequeath us a false estimate of Miltonic agency.

Of poetic diction preciosity is surely prose cousin, and if Professor Raleigh gives us less of it here than on previous occasions, he provides

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## *Professor Raleigh on Milton*

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specimens—"Plangency," "numerous verse," "He renayed his ancestry," "Passably obscure" (equals "negligibly"), "Excellent liberty" (equals "liberty not accorded to others"), and so on. We also notice a curiously prosaic misquotation—

"Of which all Europe talks from side to side"—

instead of "rings." But, after all, as for preciousness, it has, like poetic diction, its strong as well as its weak side, and, however we regard it, will not greatly injure a book which it is a pleasure to read and to applaud.

*Saturday Review*, January 5, 1901.



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## *Wordsworth the Unequal\**

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“**T**WO voices are there : one is of the deep ;  
It learns the storm-cloud’s thunderous  
melody,  
Now roars, now murmurs with the  
changing sea,  
Now bird-like pipes, now closes soft in sleep :  
And one is of an old half-witted sheep  
Which bleats articulate monotony,  
And indicates that two and one are three,  
That grass is green, lakes damp, and mountains steep :  
And, Wordsworth, both are thine : at certain times  
Forth from the heart of thy melodious rhymes  
The form and pressure of high thoughts will burst :  
At other times—good Lord ! I’d rather be  
Quite unacquainted with the A.B.C.  
Than write such hopeless rubbish as thy worst !”

We quote the late J. K. S. at this length partly in the friendly hope that we may be introducing to some stray reader for the first time that fine metrical humorist, but also because the lines deposit us in a neat summary way at Professor Raleigh’s point of departure. We say advisedly, his point of departure, for he must pardon us if we liken this particular essay to the kind of train

\* “Wordsworth,” by Walter Raleigh. London : Edward Arnold, 1903.

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specified of old in Mr. Burnand's phantasmal Bradshaw—which starts, indeed, and runs, but does not arrive. The traveller by this train need not fear boredom. The wheels will be rolling and rattling out to him clever and suggestive Raleighisms all the time—but he will not get to Charing Cross.

The case of Wordsworth is not only strange—it is, to the best of our knowledge, unique. Poets, of course, there have been who owed more to matter than melody. Byron, for example (as Mr. Swinburne very vigorously insists), had so primitive an ear that we might almost think of him as arboreal. He provides us in consequence with few or none of those test lines by which as by an aneroid barometer we may find out on Matthew Arnold's system whether or no we are still on the lower slopes of Parnassus. In Wordsworth, on the other hand, such lines are as uncountable and as beautiful as the stars. The bare words—"far-off Hebrides"—"the most ancient Heavens"—"the mighty waters"—may by mere immediate reminiscence thrill readers not unforgetful that in hastily remembering the better-known lyrical poems they are leaving out of account various blank-verse passages of incomparable and immortal splendour. And yet it was this man—this Wordsworth—thinking of whose best things one almost wonders whether it is lawful to call him a man—who could not only on

occasion be excruciatingly flat, but was also capable of wilfully sinking to the vicious practice of inversion. This is no mere pedantry—to which a man might say—"Do'st thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more split infinitives?" It is not as if the practice of inversion were some venial license or captivating eccentricity in regard to which it might be better to err with Pope than shine with Pye. From cover to cover of the "Golden Treasury" it will be found, roughly speaking, absent; and it has, in fact, in every epoch been the monopoly of the poetaster. Our own pet instance is from Pomfret emulating Pindar, and with this much material to light the fire—"Whatever is made must suppose a maker, as an effect shows a cause that could produce it." He then lights it—

"Whate'er is made a maker must suppose,  
As an effect a cause, that could produce it, shows."

But inversion is tenacious of life in every age and still paces hobblingly alongside of poetry. If split infinitives and vicious inversions were the way to glory, *Truth's* barrel organist—whom we bring in not wantonly here, but for the sake of a subsequent illustration—would long ago have been made a bright constellation in the heavens. In the mean time, Wordsworth, with his—"yet so it was an ewe I bought and other sheep from her I raised"—"My name is Alice Fell, and I to

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## *Wordsworth the Unequal*

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Durham, sir, belong!"—or, "We'll for our whistles run a race," sets the teeth of his admirers all the more on edge because he is not emulating Pindar, but pretending—and pretending very badly—to talk like a peasant. And yet such is the greatness of the poet, that these same unhappy admirers can hardly snatch even a fearful joy in pointing this out, but feel rather as if they had handed themselves over to some spirit sacrilegious and unholy.

From "inversion" we pass to the general question of "prosaicalness" in Wordsworth. It is useless at this late time of day to gaze again upon the grave which was three feet long and two feet wide—let us rather take the quatrain which chances to be quoted here from "Hartleap Well":

"Here on the grass perhaps asleep he sank  
Lulled by the fountain in the summer-tide;  
This water was perhaps the first he drank  
When he had wandered from his mother's side."

To write "asleep he sank" in order to rhyme with "drank," a modern rhymster would have to be less than a minor poet—and as for the abrupt cadence of the word "summer-tide," it is like a chair withdrawn from one about to sit. The iteration of "perhaps" has the audacity of greatness determined at all costs to be bald. Wordsworth, at his best, was Vergil's equal in verbal music, and, as many would think, psychically his superior, yet

he gives us a quatrain which reads just like a wooden translation out of Vergil by a second-rate sixth-form boy. But Vergil, unlike Wordsworth, was a true lover and respecter of his craft. He did not ask for a stricken deer—he was quite content to glorify a shovel. Hence Charles Tennyson Turner, standing in the straw-yard and watching “the straw of harvest, sever’d from the corn, climb and fall over in the murky air,” thinks, in his modesty, of Vergil—

“I could but feel  
With what a rich precision He would draw  
The endless ladder and the booming wheel !”

Wordsworth, truly great indeed, but lacking what goodness knows who first called “the modesty of true greatness,” flung (like Whistler, *selon* Ruskin), take it or leave it, any kind of metrical hotch-pot in the face of the public.

In thinking how he came to do this we revert, for our illustrational purposes, to *Truth's* barrel organist—whom we know only in his poetry—but who seems to have said thus within himself : “I am writing for a paper which holds man to be a miserable emmet, and the cult of ‘high’ (save the mark !) poetry an almost actionable imposture and fraud—split infinitives and vicious inversions may help to draw attention to the dull mechanic nature of this so-called industry !” A quite legitimate attitude this for the indispensable

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## *Wordsworth the Unequal*

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parodist, and much like that of Wordsworth, except that whereas *Truth* revolted against poetry itself, Wordsworth revolted against "Poetic Diction." Wordsworth's soliloquy might run something as follows: "'Reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fires' indeed! No, no. 'The minster clock has just struck two, and yonder is the moon.' That is what I will give them. I hate their affectations, and will be puerile in order to show how much I scorn to be pompous." To account for the difference between Wordsworth's theory and his practice, writers have to make despairing resort to the miraculous, and say that Urania, visiting the poet nightly, put the finest poetic diction perforce into his mouth. But it is really no explanation at all to say that he wrote "The Affliction of Margaret" without inversions, because the Muse came in and wrote it for him.

Professor Raleigh does not disagree—he only fails to elucidate. "The Seer" (who might surely now drop this decayed title) kept getting, as he says, in the poet's way; The Seer, in fact, was poet one, and Wordsworth was poet two, which, as Mr. Brooke in "Middlemarch" might have said, "would be true in both senses, you know!" But looking back to this critic's "Milton," in which he pointed out, not for the first time, perhaps, but with no little illustrational acuteness, that Milton was the real begetter of "Poetic Diction," we did hope for some new literary light upon

the problem set by J. K. S. It may be insoluble—for the bare conceivability of course remains that Wordsworth spoke alternately like a sheep and like a god by a kind of fluke, and because he did not know himself when he was doing which. The extreme literary finish of his finer verse forbids us to believe it—even on tiny points of technique he was a pioneer, and pioneers are not usually stone blind to what they are doing. In the case of redundant syllables, for example (now the common heritage of rhymers), Wordsworth wrote "Where rivulets dance their wayward round" at a time when some hare-hearted Popian would have fled dismayed from the word or had it printed "riv'let." And yet some of his criticism was fairly staggering—he writes concerning prose, that "if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind." One can but think of Dryden's line—"For to write verse with him is to transprose." An inquiry into the whole problem should start with the fact pointed out by Mr. Myers, in his splendid "Men of Letters" monograph, that Wordsworth possessed the gift of melody only from 1798 to 1818, and that after that "he continued as wise and as earnest as ever, but his poems had no longer any potency nor his existence much public importance." The inquiry should proceed to Wordsworth's favourite

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## *Wordsworth the Unequal*

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authors, and in what way they influenced his style.

Enlightenment on such points we have here expected in vain—but the critic, if not more original, is stronger on the psychological side. Jowett always thought the lines “To me the meanest flower,” etc., over-strung and over-strained, and Mr. John Morley seems to have said that a man can learn nothing whatever of moral wisdom by means of an “impulse from a vernal wood.” Not the worst passages here are those in which it is rightly insisted that for those who do not see that the doctrine on which he dwelt throughout his lifetime is no detachable ornamental appendage, but at the very core and centre of the poet’s mind and art, Wordsworth is a sealed book and a dead letter.

*Saturday Review*, March 28, 1903.



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## *Burns the Bilingual\**

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**N**O less than four new editions of the immortal poet of a parish remind us of the days when his parochial vernacular seemed unlikely enough to capture the ear of all Europe. "I despair," said Cowper, speaking of the difficulty which the dialect of Burns presented to a Southron—"I despair of meeting any Englishman who will take the pains that I have taken to understand him. His candle is bright, but shut up in a dark lantern." Dr. Moore, of "Zeluco" fame—or oblivion—a man of intelligence much above the average, addressed to Burns in 1787 a long letter of admonition on the subject of this dialect of his. In view of the present position of Burns as a poet, and of the qualifications of Dr. Moore

\* "The Poetry of Robert Burns," edited by W. E. Henley and T. F. Henderson. 3 vols. Edinburgh: T. C. and E. C. Jack. 1901.

"Poetical Works of Robert Burns," edited with notes, etc., by J. A. Manson. London: Black. 1901.

"Poetical Works of Robert Burns," edited with notes, etc., by William Wallace. London and Edinburgh: Chambers. 1902.

"The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Burns." (New Century Library.) London: Nelson. 1902.

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## *Burns the Bilingual*

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as a censor of Scotch poetry, it makes comical reading enough. Not only was Burns bidden to adopt the Southern dialect, and so cease to limit the number of his readers to those who "understand the Scottish," but he was also enjoined to undertake a long national poem of an Epic nature. To this end he was to read abridgments of Greek and Roman history, the salient facts of which "must highly delight a poetical mind"—the heathen mythology, "which in itself is charmingly fanciful"—and finally the history of France and Great Britain from the beginning of Henry VII.'s reign. It seems by no means impossible that if Burns had lived longer Dr. Moore's injunctions would have been carried out. By his own constant confession, highly ambitious of fame, Burns may well have had misgivings analogous to those which caused so many writers to compose in Latin because they believed that their own living language was doomed. Genuinely as his readers may to this hour be affected by Burns's early death, they cannot pretend sorrow that the author of "The Jolly Beggars" did not live to leave us a national poem after—and it would have been very much after—the manner of Cowper's "Task." Burns hesitated, it seems, whether to adopt the Scotch dialect or the English; but if he had chosen English, a bad imitation of Cowper is what it would have come to. "The Task" was his pocket companion, and we find him writing later

on to Mrs. Dunlop little critical judgments upon Homer, Vergil, Dryden, etc., after the manner of poets in search of the "best models."

In the mean time, there sat in the critical background the literati of the Modern Athens, afraid of a Scotch idiom as of a solecism, and potential allies no doubt of Dr. Moore. Lucky was it that Burns was born into the world when wood-notes wild had still a vogue and a vitality, and before the language of the North had been altogether interleaved and overpowered by southern classicism. In Burns's day a sort of international commerce of rhymes had for some time been going on between England and Scotland. The mid-century English songbook, "The Lark," which Burns carried about with him as a boy, contained, for example, such things as "Waly Waly" and the "Blithesome Bridal," which its author, Sir William Scott of Thirlstane, is said to have sung with success in London drawing-rooms, perhaps soon after the year 1700. Conversely Dr. Percy's English ballad, "O Nancy, wilt thou go with me?" was Scotticised for Johnson's "Musical Museum," and, as a matter of fact, we generally hear "go" quoted "gang." This particular ballad happened to have merit; but, speaking generally, the South had in the eighteenth century nothing of any lyrical value to give to the North. The Scotch could still boast of real lyrists, such as Ferguson or Ramsay, while we could produce

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## *Burns the Bilingual*

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nothing but a Shenstone, of some of the best of whose verses, as recited to him by Boswell in the "Tour of the Hebrides," even his compatriot Johnson could be led to pronounce no more than the grudging yet surely not quite inadequate encomium—"That seems to be pretty." The ludicrous fervours of Burns about Shenstone—"whose divine elegies do honour to our language, our nation, and our species"—strikingly betoken the danger in which he stood from his southern inferiors. As to the merits of Shenstone, and especially his prose, we side with Boswell rather than with Johnson; but when we read such a rhapsody as the above, we find ourselves inverting Shelley's phrase, and thinking of the desire of the star for the moth.

Besides his English and his vernacular, Burns had a third way of writing, which consisted simply in turning the one into the other by mere alterations of spelling. Take the first and last stanzas of "Chloris"—

"My Chloris mark how green the groves,  
The primrose banks how fair;  
The balmy gales awake the flowers  
And wave thy flaxen hair.

These wild-wood flowers I've pu'd, to deck  
That spotless breast o' thine;  
The courtier's gems may witness love,  
But 'tis na love like mine."

The last stanza here is no less absolutely English than the first. Something of the same kind may of course be said of "Scots wha hae." We cannot quite go Mr. Henley's length and call it pure eighteenth-century English, since to our ear "Scots who have with Wallace bled" would be a vicious inversion, whereas the northern spelling, for some reason, seems to carry it off without a hitch; but such phrases as "See the front of battle lour" or "See your sons in servile chains" are certainly more suggestive of the odes of Gray than of Burns at his vernacular best. This lyric, in fact, seems from first to last to have owed much to patriotism and much to music.

As to the premeditated English verse of Burns, the abysmal deeps of platitude to which we could sink are best seen in such things as the elegy on Lord Monboddo's daughter—

"Life ne'er exulted in so rich a prize  
As Burnet lovely from her native skies;  
Nor envious Death so triumph'd in a blow  
As that which laid the accomplished Burnet low,"

or in the lines beginning, "Sensibility, how charming." After all, and even so, he was not worse than our Pyes and Hayleys; and Macaulay's early skit, "The Tears of Sensibility," which some of his family took in deadly earnest, survives to remind us what hopeless models England had to offer. The lines commonly called "To Mary

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## *Burns the Bilingual*

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in Heaven " have been considered his best English effort, but if they are not affected, they certainly contrive to seem so.

"See'st thou thy lover lowly laid ?

Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast ?"

has surely the ring of falsity—the only difficulty being that in the eighteenth century there was so much falsetto in the air that a poet might be found uttering it from the very depths of his soul. To our thinking, the "Prayer in the prospect of Death," reminiscent in a way of Pope's "Universal Prayer," is as convincingly sincere as anything that Burns did in English verse. None knew better than himself where his own strength lay. "These English songs," he writes, "gravel me to death. I have not that command of the language that I have of my native tongue." Let us be grateful that he left us so much of his native tongue as he did. Even in the North it is now to all intents and purposes a classic language. The admirable Scotch paraphrases of Horace which appeared of recent years in the *Scotsman* were just as much the exertions of a scholar as if they had been translations out of Burns into the language of Horace himself.

In considering the prose of Burns we have only his English to deal with, except for the letter which he addressed to a friend in the broadest of broad dialects—a playful mode of

composition at which Stevenson also tried his hand. The extraordinary diversity in the style of Burns's letters has always been a puzzle to his critics. He writes at times with the straightforward simplicity of an Arthur Young, and becomes at others as flowery as Hervey meditating among the tombs. "O Clarinda! shall we not meet in a state, some yet unknown state of being, where the lavish hand of plenty shall minister to the highest wish of benevolence; and where the chill north wind of prudence shall never blow over the flowery fields of enjoyment?" The fact seems to be that it amused him to play at fine writing, and he would pour forth to his correspondents passionate reflections upon life in general which he copied out of his last year's commonplace book, and in all this, as in the case of similar antics on Byron's part, there was a "note of provinciality." The education of neither poet was equal to his genius. On the other hand, a former editor of Burns was justly incensed with Matthew Arnold, who accused Burns of provinciality because he described "Scotch drink, Scotch religion, Scotch manners"—thus confounding provinciality of subject with provinciality of thought. On this showing Jane Austen would have been a most provincial writer. It must be added that Burns had that curious faculty of divination which belongs to creative genius—the power of seeing to the very heart of matters which might have

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## *Burns the Bilingual*

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been supposed unfamiliar. Let those who may chance to be versed better in our history than our poetry turn to the dialect squib called "The Dream," with its vivid portraiture of the personages of the Georgian Court. That Burns, alternating between Edinburgh and the plough-tail, should have written a London satire so tellingly intimate is not the least wonderful thing in a wonderful record.

*Saturday Review*, February 8, 1902.



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## *Mr. Paul's Arnold\**

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**W**E were half afraid for a moment that we might not be going to find Mr. Paul at his brilliant best when we read among his very first sentences that for the understanding of Matthew Arnold "a capacity for appreciating form and style, the charm of rhythm, and the beauty of words, is undoubtedly essential." Of what meritorious poet could not that be said? but the platitude struck us as peculiarly unhappy when applied to Matthew Arnold. Mr. Paul both sees and says later in his essay that in spite of the lovely and, as one likes to think, immortal examples which Matthew Arnold gave us of the beauty of words no poet ever showed a more amazing aptitude for periodically letting his reader down with a thump by means of some abrupt colloquialism, vicious inversion, metrical cacophony, or phrasal falsetto. Take the apostrophe to the Stars and Waters—

"Still, still let me as I gaze upon you  
Feel my soul becoming vast like you!"

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\* "Matthew Arnold," by H. W. Paul. *English Men of Letters Series*. London : Macmillan. 1902.

It is a pity, no doubt, that a perfectly grammatical expression should have this disillusionizing conversational sound. But so it is, and poets have to circumvent these little pitfalls as Gray, for example, did when he wrote, "Nor you, ye proud," etc., where the "ye" saves the situation. "That urbane and stately poem" could never have contained such a line as Matthew Arnold's, which always reminds us of a young lady's letter describing the delight of "looking up at the Alps and feeling how small one felt." Take, again, the shocking fatuity of such things as—

"But so many schemes thou breedest  
That thy poor head almost turns!"

a mode of writing which a really great master of style would never have imported from Germany. Nor are the inversions less ugly and disconcerting. A heinous example is that in "Empedocles" about Love's right hand—

"Which the lightnings doth embrace;"

and we get it again in the following highly characteristic stanza—

"I will not know. For wherefore try  
To things by mortal course that live  
A shadowy durability  
For which they were not meant to give."

Let a reader try the effect of putting these words

in their proper sequence. This trailing topsyturvy quatrain is surely best described in Dryden's phrase as—

“A hobbling kind of prose  
That limped along and tinkled in the close.”

In the matter both of the inverted and the prosaic Matthew Arnold was, of course, the literary heir of the poet who thought that he made peasants talk the “language of common life” when he made them say—

“My name is Alice Fell,  
And I to Durham, sir, belong”—

or—

“Down to the stump of yon old yew  
We'll for our whistles run a race.”

It is noteworthy that Wordsworth at his best would write whole poems—“The Affliction of Margaret” is an instance—without a single inversion. In an exclusive repertory of good things, such as the “Golden Treasury,” they are seen to be equally rare in good English poets of every epoch. As for prosaicisms, Mr. Swinburne, who has lately turned round on his old idol, formerly instanced Arnold's use of “convey” in the lines

“Come airs and floating echoes and convey  
A melancholy into all our day”

as a felicitously Wordsworthian adoption of a word commonly confined to prose. That may be so in an individual case ; but his addiction to prose words surely furnished Matthew Arnold with more flaws than felicities. His verse vocabulary abounded in such words as "relegate" and "discern" (this last a great favourite, frequently emphasized with rhyme), and in ultra-prosaicalisms, such as "every function less exact." In more than one passage the soul "leaves its last employ" like a page-boy bettering himself. As for cacophonies, the line

"And by contrition sealed thrice sure"

can probably be read aloud by few. Mr. Paul goes so far as to think that some of Matthew Arnold's unrhymed lyrics make it permissible to doubt whether he had any ear at all—but then Mr. Paul is more set against the rhymeless lyric than we chance to be. One little point about Matthew Arnold was, perhaps, not quite unsymptomatic—his fondness for italics in poetry. Even in prose, italics savour of the forcible feeble, but when a poet, whose metre, given an educated audience, should endow him with all the dominion of emphasis and pause, condescends to the cheap intervention of italics, he is no better than the child that scrawls below its drawing—"This is a cow."

Twenty years ago, what we are saying here

had hardly been said—though it has been said since, in effect, by Professor Saintsbury and one or two others. It was rather curious that Matthew Arnold's style was held up for so long as entirely impeccable. Partly it was a parrot cry—swelled, no doubt, by the strong appeal which Matthew Arnold naturally made to Oxford sympathies—and, among the more unthinking sort, by an idea that so serious and constant a critic of style must himself have a style above criticism—a kind of variant on the thesis that "who drives fat oxen should himself be fat." Moreover, who but must feel a certain sense of sacrilege in picking holes in even the worst verses of poets over whose best they have shed tears? With the prose it was slightly otherwise. Men began sooner to ask each other what has now passed into commonplace—whether the author was not indictable for self-repetition and flippancy? Mr. Paul remarks, in his amusing way, that Matthew Arnold's attitude was often that of the Bellman in "The Hunting of the Snark"—"What I tell you three times is true." He also cites a self-repetition simply and baldly verbal—the passage about "The European Reviews," with its four sentences each ending with the identical words, "and with as much play of mind as may suit its being that." As he says, this kind of thing becomes excruciating, and we have always thought with him that the

sentence at the end of a famous essay—"Let St. Francis—nay, or Luther either—beat that!" is a monumental instance of misplaced levity.

Mr. Swinburne accentuated the anomaly of Matthew Arnold's parentage by calling him David, the son of Goliath. Whether Dr. Arnold was in any injurious sense a Philistine, or what influence he had on what Bagehot called his "small apple-eating animals," we need not now stop to inquire; but it was indeed a curious incunabulum for the lackadaisical volatility of a Matthew Arnold. He was a dove from an eagle's nest; and Horace says, without meaning it, that when haughty eagles propagate a dove, he is not without pugnacity. And so this dove of sweetness, and light, and *ἐπιείκεια*, whose amiability and utter unresentfulness are strongly brought out by Mr. Paul, would still be pecking away at his age and his countrymen—at their country seats, "the great fortified posts of the barbarians," the hideousness of hymns and villas, the paucity of ideas and ideals in England, the undovelike dissidence of dissent, the vulgarity of Bottles, the coarseness and crudity of our literature as compared with that produced under the sway of Academies. In all this, who shall say that he did not do good in his capacity of one who was neither an optimist nor a pessimist, but, in Harriet Martineau's phrase, a meliorist?

What his influence, if any, was upon the

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politics of his age might be worth a separate inquiry ; but Matthew Arnold as a poet can never be disassociated from religion—"morality touched with emotion." As for his attacks on orthodoxy and his ambitious coinages in the way of definition, they need not detain us long. That Orthodoxy cannot in truth be re-formulated by any individual efforts of phrasemaking. Whewell observed that nothing was gained by calling the impenetrability of matter "The Ungothroughsomeness of Stuff," and in a like spirit an Oxford essayist remarked, apropos of Matthew Arnold's metaphysics, that to degrade "I am that I am" into "I blow and grow, that I do," was not a praiseworthy achievement. In fact, Matthew Arnold could do but little to substitute "streams of tendency" and other coinages for shorter and more sacred terms. Mr. Paul does not, we think, refer to a detailed examination of this terminology made some seventeen years ago in the *Contemporary* by the late Mr. Traill. It simply "came a-two in his hands," like the housemaid's bit of china, and it does so once more here in those of Mr. Paul. But though the poet may have contributed little to theology—and though, like his great model, he may often have been *dispar sibi* in literary finish—in poetry, at all events, he never fell below himself in high seriousness of soul. When Matthew Arnold approached the shrine of poetry all his flippancy fell away and left him in that

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## Mr. Paul's Arnold

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"hidden ground of thought and of austerity within." Whatever may be thought of the literary style of such a couplet as "Tasks in hours of insight willed," etc. (and to us, we admit, it has sometimes seemed rather jingly), the thought has no doubt already helped many and will help many more. There are not too many English poets who have drawn a real inspiration from religion without being ecclesiastical like Keble or despairful like Clough.

Mr. Paul is perhaps not quite so good here as when he is saying just what he wants to say unhampered by the necessary details of a short memoir. As he points out, the materials for a Life of Matthew Arnold are not copious, and his personality never came out in his letters. On one little point we think Mr. Paul hypercritical. He suggests that the word "oblivion" in the lines

"Oblivion in lost angels can infuse  
Of the lost glory and the trailing wing"

might be called inaccurate, because it is the unsoiled glory and the soaring wing that the angels would remember. Surely, however, a man might say—"I hobble out every day to my work, but I cannot forget my rheumatism." But that is truly a trifle. Mr. Paul is known to us all as a brilliant *causeur* in literature and "so let him sit with us for many an hour."

*Saturday Review*, March 28, 1903.

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## *Ipsissima*

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**I** KNOW I was not thus athirst  
For kisses when we greeted first—  
Love's dayspring waits the fuller noon  
When first the hands of lovers meet,  
And only hearts made truly one  
Know kisses truly sweet ;  
Yet sure some hint, some presage passed,  
Some augury of love at last.

E'en then our thoughts could watch arise  
Their answer in each other's eyes—  
Could read self-loyalty serene,  
Serene disloyalty to law,  
And knowledge that we had not been  
A part of what we saw—  
Thrown high above our acts control,  
In grave security of soul.

We neither welcomed nor withstood  
Man's vulgar evil, vulgar good—  
In wider spheres our memory moves  
Than fools of conscience dare confess—  
Weak loves and passion-centred loves,  
And loves in idleness—

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## *Ipsissima*

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And loves which others buy and sell,  
Too venal to be vendible.

Yes, we have known them, thou and I  
Have known, and have not passed them by.

In spite of these, thou art thyself,  
And I, myself, in spite of these—

Like ships that graze a rocky shelf  
When ebb the midnight seas,  
We that have grazed a thousand shelves,  
Float off the sovereign of ourselves.

For us the love which others rue  
Shall still be wise and still be true,  
Enduring through unwisdom, wise,

Through insincerity, sincere ;

For no less virginally lies

The lily on the mere,

Because at whiles her fixed root  
Has felt the fingers of the newt.

Thus heart in heart, and hand in hand  
We seem to fall and feel we stand ;

Let others school desire, and plot

To make the nature which they mar,

Let others be what they are not,

Let us be what we are—

By alien consciences unshriven,  
Self-known, self-pitying, self-forgiven !

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## *An Unaccomplished Poet \**

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**F**EW of those who have formed a definite taste in poetry are likely to read much of Mathilde Blind except out of personal friendship or "in the way of business." Judging the author, as we now do, solely by this volume with its prefatory memoir and portrait, we can well believe her to have been beautiful, vivacious, and endowed with no ordinary share of what passes for cleverness. Such a little thumb-nail sketch as this will prove so much—"one of the plainest of women, thin-lipped and coarse-skinned, with the profile of a crow and its sharp vigilant eye"—and some of the letters quoted seem to prove something more. Take the description of the storm on Loch Maree: "So heavily did it beat on the loch that the water splashed up as if stones were falling into it, and the surface where it hailed looked like one white seething mass several feet in height, not stationary, however, but travelling onwards with incredible rapidity. . . . At last on the morning of the third

\* "The Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind," edited by Arthur Symonds, with a Memoir by Richard Garnett. London: Unwin. 1900.

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## *An Unaccomplished Poet*

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day the sun shone forth, the vapours lolled languidly about Ben Slioch, whose peaks rose untrammelled above them," etc. The whole passage is more than merely clever; it implies also an eye for nature and an ear for language. Nevertheless, when we come to Miss Blind's poetry, her name falls to be added—on the whole and with certain reservations—to the long list of those who have made the mistake of thinking that the capacity for emotion implies the power of expression. It may be said of Mathilde Blind that she strictly meditated an uncommonly thankless muse.

We have seldom come across a writer of such pretensions and such experience capable of being quite so amateurish. The effects produced are sometimes highly laughable—

"Where, above the fair Sicilian flock-browsed flower-  
pranked meadows, looms  
Ætna — hoariest of volcanoes — ominously veiled in  
fumes."

The last line, with its quaint parenthesis, suggests the comic muse of Calverley, and finding, as we do, the same note in other passages, we are led seriously to believe that the style of the authoress was influenced by "Verses and Translations." The same influence can be traced in the following couplet on the mummy kings of Egypt—

“Had the sun once brushed them lightly, or a breath of  
air, they must  
Instantaneously have crumbled into evanescent dust.”

That is written quite seriously, but it is absurdly like C. S. C. We were not previously aware, by the way, that mummies were of such an alarmingly friable consistence—but perhaps, as Alice might have said, these were a particular sort. Here is another gem—

“Woe, woe to Man and all his hapless brood !  
No rest for him no peace is to be found ;  
He may have tamed wild beasts and made the ground  
Yield corn and wine and every kind of food.”

“And every kind of food” is a delicious phrase. After this fashion is it that the fifth-form boy, not unconscious to himself of his own inadequacy, ekes out his borrowed thought with tags of verbiage and puts it into a demanded metre.

“But the phantasms of the mind  
Who shall master, yea, who bind !”

A copious use of the expletival “yea” is a favourite and characteristic falsetto of this author. She gives us a good many decasyllabic couplets reminiscent of Campbell or Southey at his lowest ebb and flattest pitch, and in fact, considering that she was born as late as 1841, we do not quite understand how she came to produce in her earlier verse such an antiquated and pre-Victorian effect.

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## *An Unaccomplished Poet*

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Perhaps her Continental upbringing had something to do with it. Here is a couplet on prehistoric man—

“He—having hit the brown bird on the wing  
And slain the roe—returns at evening.”

No doubt a prehistoric man may have managed to hit a bird on the wing, and no doubt the bird may have been brown, but it is quite characteristic of the author's lack of literary perception that she should have used language which suggests, not prehistoric man, but an autumn shooting lodge in the Highlands. Our visions of Scotch partridges and roe-deer are, however, rather upset later on, when we find that the man who hit the brown bird was of a bronze colour.

In addition to her want of literary tact in such things, Miss Blind's sense of metre was also very rudimentary—

“I charge you, O winds of the West, O winds with the  
wings of the dove,  
That ye blow o'er the brows of my love, breathing low  
that I sicken for love.”

Unless we had quoted this couplet nobody could tell in what metre this subsequent line was meant to be written—

“I rise like one in a dream when I see the red sun flaring  
low.”

“Breathing low” and “flaring low” are both



meant to be anapæsts. It is true, as we said lately, that verse depends for its merit upon subtle violations of a norm—but this is not a subtle violation; it is a brutal outrage. We have observed that this particular cacophony in anapæsts is eminently diagnostic of a defective ear in poets. We cannot stop to search for the reason, nor are we confident that we could find it, why this particular discord should be less allowable than others, but that it is so the practice of good poets proves. And, in the name of Robinson Ellis, who found—was it twelve?—false quantities in the first line of “Evangeline,” what kind of an hexameter is this?—

“Auroral pulsations thrilled faintly and striking the blank heaving surface!”

If there are twelve in the other there must surely be twenty-four in that.

Dr. Garnett tells us that Mathilde Blind was an enthusiastic admirer of Mrs. Browning, and says of “Aurora Leigh”—“This remarkable poem, over-estimated in its own day, has been unduly disparaged since.” We cordially and emphatically agree. Apart from its deep feeling and true poetry, “Aurora Leigh” is a marvel of literary tact and cleverness. The way in which all trivialities of daily life, down to the very babble of drawing-rooms, are handled without ever verging on bathos or absurdity is a way which Mathilde

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## *An Unaccomplished Poet*

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Blind may have admired, but certainly did not learn.

“ ‘Dead ! Good luck to her ! ’ the man’s teeth chattered,  
Stone still stared he with blank eyes and hard,  
Then, his frame with one big sob nigh shattered,  
Fled—and cut his throat down in the yard.”

Not after this crude fashion was it that Mrs. Browning wrote of the tragedy of Marian Erle. That “Aurora Leigh” was over-estimated in its own day is a remark which seems to require qualification. One remembers what FitzGerald thought of it, and listen to J. R. Lowell : “Her muse is a fast young woman, with the lavish ornament and somewhat overpowering perfume of the demi-monde.” What a monstrous misconception of the frail and spiritual Elizabeth Barrett !

We have seen Mathilde Blind at her worst, let us now see her at her best. Her best lyric is quite worth quoting in full—

“ Ah, if you knew how soon and late  
My eyes long for a sight of you,  
Sometimes in passing by my gate  
You’d linger until fall of dew,  
If you but knew !

“ Ah, if you knew how sick and sore  
My life flags for the want of you,  
Straightway you’d enter at the door  
And clasp my hand between your two,  
If you but knew !

“ Ah, if you knew how lost and lone  
I watch and weep and wait for you  
You'd press my heart close to your own  
Till love had healed me through and through,  
If you but knew ! ”

If Christina Rossetti had never written, neither could this little poem, which has some of the charm of the rondeau without its artificiality, have come into being, but the author has none the less the credit of having written at least one lyric which seems to come straight from her heart and to go straight to ours. We think these small successes in poetry are sometimes due to a sort of happy chance, for, speaking of Miss Blind's poetry as a whole, she was deficient in what Wordsworth prosaically called the accomplishment of verse.

*Saturday Review*, November 10, 1900.

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## *Amor Sepulchralis*

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**A**MONG the tombs we kept our solemn  
tryst.  
So seemed her eyes as love begot no  
twin

Love-longing, but renewed his own therein.  
Her lips were rose and velvet. As we kissed,  
Methought a cave-eyed skull with all his teeth  
Grinned in a grave beneath.

Then "Trust not time," I cried, "lest love unfed  
Hunger to death before another night—  
Nay, sweetest, but before two dawns grow bright  
Shall they that watch be weeping and we wed!"  
But he that heard me play the lover so  
Grinned lewdly from below.

And forth we twain—in shock of shipwreck she  
To die before two dawns grew bright, and I  
To look upon her dying and not die—  
Stole trembling from the place where dead men be.  
But he that wist whereto my love was bound  
Mouthed softly underground.

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## *Leigh Hunt as a Poet*

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“ I HAVE not shovelled my verses out by cart-loads, leaving the public, much less another generation, to save me the trouble of selection. I do not believe that other generations will take the trouble to rake for jewels in much nobler dust than mine. Posterity is too rich and idle. The only hope I can have of coming into any one's hands, and exciting his attention beyond the moment, is by putting my workmanship, such as it is, into the best and compactest state.” Such is the modest declaration prefixed by Leigh Hunt to a collection of his poems published in 1832, and containing, as he says, not above a third of the verses he had written. That he was decidedly overscrupulous in winnowing his own productions is abundantly clear. The intercession, for example, of a “partial friend” (probably Keats) was found necessary to procure the insertion of the beautiful sonnet on the Nile—

“It flowed through old hushed Ægypt and its sands  
Like some grave mighty thought threading a dream,  
And times and things, as in that vision, seem  
Keeping along it their eternal stands—

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## *Leigh Hunt as a Poet*

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Caves, pillars, pyramids, the shepherd bands  
That roamed through the young earth, the glory  
extreme

Of high Sesostris, and that southern beam,  
The laughing queen that caught the world's great  
hands.

Then comes a mightier silence, stern and strong,  
As of a world left empty of its throng,  
And the void weighs on us ; and then we wake,  
And hear the fruitful stream lapsing along  
'Twixt villages, and think how we shall take  
Our own calm journey on for human sake."

Of a poem entitled "The Nymphs" he retained only a few passages. Yet of this poem Shelley wrote, "What a delightful poem 'The Nymphs' is ! especially the second part. It is truly *poetical* in the intense and emphatic sense of the word." This does not read like an insincerity of friendship. In point of fact, Leigh Hunt was far too keen a critic to take pleasure in the manufacture of what he used to call "*heart* and *impart* verses." But in the mean time, before any question arises of "raking in the dust" of Leigh Hunt's poetry, one is arrested by the more initial misgivings, whether the verses which he himself was willing to believe worth reading have not unjustly lost the ear of the world. That no author can be written up or down except by himself is a truism which he endorses in his autobiography ; but, on the other hand, no man can write himself up, if

he be out of print, and it may be suspected that many forgotten worthies are left in that limbo by the mere oscitancy of publishers. The public ought to be, and no doubt is, duly grateful for the convenient existing edition of much of Leigh Hunt's prose, but his poems are now not very easily obtainable in England. America has shown herself more appreciative. Perhaps a short consideration of his special excellencies as a poet may help to recall attention to writings which deserve, at all events, to be easily accessible.

Leigh Hunt made a very early appearance as a writer of verse. In the year 1801, when he was only sixteen, a collection of his boyish poems was published under the title of "*Juvenilia*," and ran through no less than four editions. The most interesting thing in connection with this early volume is the observation made upon it by Byron to the author, on the occasion of their first meeting.

"He told me that the sight of my volume at Harrow had been one of his incentives to write verses, and that he had had the same passion for friendship as I had displayed in it. To my astonishment he quoted some of the lines, and would not hear me speak ill of them."

For the rest, it is candidly and correctly described in Leigh Hunt's own words, as "a heap of imitations all but absolutely worthless. I wrote odes because Collins and Gray had written

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## *Leigh Hunt as a Poet*

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them ; pastorals, because Pope had written them ; 'blank verse,' because Akenside and Thomson had written blank verse ; and a 'Palace of Pleasure,' because Spenser had written a 'Bower of Bliss.' I had nobody to bid me go to the Nature which had originated the books." We have the usual Pantheon of abstractions from "Animation to Panting Asthma," the customary felicitations of "Dobson, happy swain ;" and the no less customary denunciations of the sceptred Neros and "purpled wretches" whose lot is cast otherwise. As for the versification, it answers for the most part to the humorous description afterwards put by Leigh Hunt into the mouth of Apollo in the "Feast of the Poets"—

"So ever since Pope, my pet bard of the town,  
Set a tune with his verses, half up and half down,  
There has been such a doting and sameness—by Jove !  
I'd as soon have gone down to see Kemble in love !"

How thoroughly Leigh Hunt outgrew this and the other false ideals of his boyhood the lines quoted partly bear witness, nor would it be worth while to dwell on his artificial immaturities, were it not for the influence which his early taste had upon his subsequent poetical practice. His addiction in boyhood to the school of Pope enabled him to view in after years with a genial catholicity of appreciation the wit and eloquence which Bowles and others set the fashion of unduly



decrying. It is probable that none are fitted to appreciate the eighteenth-century writers but those to whom their very verbiage has a certain charm of association. No one-sided sentiment of reaction against our so-called Augustan literature disqualified Leigh Hunt from becoming, as he afterwards became, the greatest master since the days of Dryden of that heroic couplet which has become to most minds indissolubly associated with the prosaic versification of the eighteenth-century school.

It seems clear that Dryden's successors, by accentuating the one defect of his versification as a whole,—his "beating too much upon the rhyme"—withdrew the attention of the great poets of the beginning of this century from the infinite capabilities of the couplet as Dryden used it. Pope, from an accurate perception where his own strength lay, and Pope's followers, from a blind submission to his authority, or from an ear defective or untrained, were fully persuaded that in discarding triplets and Alexandrines, eschewing dissyllabic rhymes, and adopting a see-saw balance of rhythm, they had effected an undoubted improvement, while the great poets of the early part of the nineteenth century either allowed themselves to fall in with this long-standing superstition, as did Byron, or discarded the couplet in disgust, as did Coleridge, and for the most part Shelley ; or, finally, ran headlong with Keats into

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## *Leigh Hunt as a Poet*

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an opposite and equally artificial extreme. "The great fault of 'Endymion,'" observes Leigh Hunt, with his usual acuteness in such matters, "next to its unpruned luxuriance (or before it rather, for it was not a fault on the right side) was the wilfulness of its rhymes. The author had a just contempt for the monotonous termination of everyday couplets, he broke up his lines in order to distribute the rhyme properly ; but, going only on the ground of his contempt, and not having yet settled with himself any principle of versification, the very exuberance of his ideas led him to make use of the first rhymes that offered ; so that, by a new meeting of extremes, the effect was as artificial and much more obtrusive, than the one under the old system. Dryden modestly confessed that a rhyme had often helped him to a thought. Mr. Keats, in the tyranny of his wealth, forced his rhymes to help him whether they would or not ; and they obeyed him, in the most singular manner, with equal promptitude and ungainliness."

Few in these days, now that we have long ceased to be harassed with the monotony of eighteenth-century verse, will dispute the justice of this verdict, or be slow to acknowledge that the fashion set by "Endymion" has produced a quantity of couplets of a very tiresome and unmusical description. The old workmanship was, at all events, neat and conscientious as far as it

went, nor was a poetic genius required to make it pass muster. The old-fashioned couplet could be handled on occasion by such prose giants as Bentley without serious disaster. A poet of the last century complacently observed that—

“He who runs may read, while well he knows  
I write in metre what he thinks in prose.”

This was all very well ; but when we find nowadays some unqualified aspirant adopting the couplet of Keats, it is a very different matter. “*Musæ furcillis præcipitem ejiciunt.*” It was formerly held that lines of unequal lengths must certainly be Pindaric, and there seems to be a tendency to hold now, that lines which escape monotony must certainly be harmonious. The tamest verse is perhaps ill-exchanged for prose run mad.

The “Story of Rimini”—Leigh Hunt’s first serious poem of importance, and written in the ten-syllable couplet—was published in 1816, with a preface advocating the still unpopular theories of poetry upheld by Wordsworth sixteen years before, in his famous “Preface to the Lyrical Ballads.” But it is observable that Leigh Hunt’s instinctive critical insight kept him clear of the mistake into which his great predecessor had fallen, in looking to an unlettered peasantry for poetical language. “The proper language of poetry is, in fact, nothing different from that of real

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## Leigh Hunt as a Poet

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life, and depends for its dignity on the strength and sentiment of what it speaks." Thus far they are agreed. But Leigh Hunt goes on, "It is only adding *musical modulation* to what a *fine understanding* might naturally utter in the midst of its griefs or enjoyments." We have here just the two vital points on which Wordsworth, in his capacity of critic, had failed to insist. A quotation from the "Story of Rimini" will exemplify what has been said with respect to versification, and present to those who may be unfamiliar with Leigh Hunt's poetry some slight notion of its distinctive character. Literary criticism without quotation is indeed *vescum papaver*—at once innutritious and soporific. An adequate idea cannot, however, be conveyed without more copious citation than will here be possible, since much of the beauty of the poem consists in the unembarrassed vivacity of transition with which the story is made to move before the reader—the affluent vigour of invention with which picture after picture is touched in before his eyes. This art of telling a story is rare in English poetry. Even considerable poets will seem at times, when occupied with narrative, to flag and loiter, and to dwell, as it were, in their stride; their notion, to vary the metaphor, is not so much a triumphal progress as a series of bivouacks. In the "Story of Rimini" succession seems to be reconciled with continuity, and every new surprise

of fancy comes upon the reader with the satisfying force of an iteration. To prove this would be to quote a whole canto. Fortunately, there is scarcely a passage which is not sufficiently picturesque in detail to suffer detachment.

“’Tis nature, full of spirits waked and springing :—  
The birds to the delicious time are singing,  
Darting with freaks and snatches up and down,  
Where the light woods go seaward from the town ;  
While happy faces, striking through the green  
Of leafy roads, at every turn are seen ;  
And the far ships, lifting their sails of white  
Like joyful hands, come up with scatterry light,  
Come gleaming up, true to the wished-for day,  
And chase the whistling brine, and swirl into the bay.

“Already in the streets the stir grows loud  
Of joy increasing and a bustling crowd.  
With feet and voice the gathering hum contends,  
Yearns the deep talk, the ready laugh ascends :  
Callings, and clapping doors, and curs unite,  
And shouts from mere exuberance of delight,  
And armed bands, making important way,  
Gallant and grave, the lords of holiday,  
And nodding neighbours, greeting as they run,  
And pilgrims chanting in the morning sun.

“With heaved-out tapestry the windows glow,  
By lovely faces brought that come and go ;  
Till, the work smoothed, and all the street attired,  
They take their seats, with upward gaze admired ;  
Some looking down, some forwards or aside,  
Some readjusting tresses, newly tied,

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Some turning a trim waist, or o'er the flow  
Of crimson cloths hanging a hand of snow ;  
But all with smiles prepared, and garlands green,  
And all in fluttering talk impatient for the scene."

There is here an *abandon*, an hilarity, a glad acceptance of the pleasure and beauty to be found in trifles, to parallel which in England we have to go back to the poets more immediately under Italian influence, and to express one aspect of which we have been forced to borrow an Italian word—"gusto." This spirit has now become so alien to our literature, the poetry of pure high spirits without any "undercurrent woe" is a thing so rare, that it is perhaps not surprising if it fails to meet with ready recognition.

Leigh Hunt himself was fond of attributing his cheerfulness to the West Indian blood in his veins, and accounted in this way for the more cordial reception his poems met with in America. In England his "animal spirits" were set down in many or most critical quarters to mere affectation, especially when they manifested themselves in any verbal eccentricities. Gifford, in the *Quarterly*, fell with rabid violence on such expressions as "scattery light." Gifford, it is true, was one of the "critics who themselves are sore," having been made ridiculous in the "Feast of the Poets ;" but other judges, who had less reasons to be biassed, concurred in his strictures. Leigh Hunt accordingly altered this and other offending

phrases in subsequent editions. Unfortunately, he further allowed himself to be criticized out of such expressions as "freaks and snatches," to which no one would now think of demurring. And yet more unfortunately, he was induced to give up a considerable number of dissyllabic rhymes. The first couplet in the passage quoted he altered as follows :—

"'Tis nature, full of spirits, waked and loved,—  
E'en sloth to-day goes quick and unproved"—

lines pleasant in themselves, but how inferior to those which they supplant !

"'Tis nature, full of spirits, waked and singing,  
The birds to the delicious time are singing,—"

The hypermetric syllables here are like the first hurried notes of the birds themselves, impatient to get into the thick of their own music.

The excellently realistic lines—

"Callings, and clapping doors, and curs unite,  
And shouts from mere exuberance of delight"—

he also sacrificed to I know not what stilted folly of censorship. Over diffidence in self-criticism was perhaps natural to one who occupied himself so much with the study of masterpieces ; but it is none the less lamentable to find him making such concessions as these to the requirements of a theory even then obsolescent. To those who

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are tempted to think that diffidence in a poet is its own justification, it may be sufficient to recall the preface to "Endymion." Most of the quotations here made I have ventured to give as they stood in the earlier editions.

Leigh Hunt took pleasure in identifying passages in his favourite Spenser with the names of great painters whose works they recalled, Titian, Claude, or Raphael. His own poetry is itself intensely pictorial, so much so, that he was accused, oddly enough, of transferring images direct from canvas ; as if looking at a cattle piece made it easier to hit off in words the

"Cattle, looking up askance  
With ruminant meek mouths, and sleepy glance."

Among numberless instances of such graphic effects, take the following of swans, occurring in a description of Naiads :—

"Others pass  
Nodding and smiling in the middle tide,  
And luring swans on, which like fondled things  
Eye poutingly their hands ; yet following, glide  
*With unsuperfluous lift of their proud wings.*"

Or this of eagles—

"Eagles on their rocks,  
With straining feet, and that fierce mouth and drear  
*Answering the strain with downward drag austere.*"



Or this of a fountain—

“And in the midst, fresh whistling through the scene,  
A lightsome fountain starts from out the green,  
Clear and compact, till at its height o’errun  
It shakes its loosening silver in the sun.”

Or this of bees with its felicitous verb—

“Then issues forth the bee to *clutch* the thyme.”

Or this, with its pleasant union of Vergilian reminiscence and direct observation, but in which the poetry, as indeed generally happens, gets beyond the reach of painting—

“But Autumn now was over, and the crane  
Began to clang against the coming rain,  
And peevish winds ran cutting o’er the sea,  
*Which oft returned a face of enmity.*”

Or this, which recalls a passage in *Tears, Idle Tears*—

“And when the casement, at the dawn of light,  
Began to show a square of ghastly white.”

Or this of a thunder-cloud—

“Sloping its dusky ladders of thick rain.”

How vivid, again, is this description of a winter’s evening—

“Nought heard through all our little lulled abode,  
Save the crisp fire, or leaf of book turned o’er,  
Or watch-dog, or the ring of frosty road.”

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Leigh Hunt felt and expressed the commonest sights and sounds in this minute and forcible fashion, as when he speaks in his Autobiography of the "mud-shine" on the pavement in front of a theatre at night, or describes how—

"Childhood I saw, glad-faced, that squeezeth tight  
One's hand, *while the rapt curtain soars away.*"

There is a theory propounded in *Rasselas* to the effect that the business of the poet is to remark only "general properties and large appearances. He does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest." He must "neglect the minuter discriminations for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness." The statement, as might have been expected from its authorship, goes somewhat too far, but the theory itself is perhaps not altogether unsound. The difficulty, of course, is to determine what may be considered to amount to vigilance or carelessness in observation. There are, however, undoubted instances in poetry of a tendency to mistake the discursive knowledge of the naturalist for the unifying emotion of the poet, and to adopt a theory which would make the admirable author of the *Gamekeeper at Home* potentially as great a poet as Keats. Leigh Hunt is never obnoxious to criticism of this kind. To be aware, for instance, of the truth of the following passage, it is enough

to have walked in the streets ; to feel it thus intensely, to utter it thus felicitously, was assuredly to be no inconsiderable poet.

“ His haughty steed, that seems by turns to be  
Vexed and made proud by that cool mastery,  
Shakes at his bit, and rolls his eyes with care,  
Reaching with stately step at the fine air ;  
And now and then, sideling his restless pace,  
*Drops with his hinder legs, and shifts his place,*  
And feels through all his frame a fiery thrill ;  
The princely rider on his back sits still,  
And looks where'er he likes, and sways him at his  
will.”

The last three lines are a fine example of Leigh Hunt's remark that the triplet “enables a poet to finish his impulse with triumph.” He characteristically adds : “I confess I like the very bracket that marks out the triplet to the reader's eye, and prepares him for the music of it. It has a look like the bridge of a lute.”

There are other lines descriptive of horses in the *Story of Rimini* to the full as good as those quoted ; but enough perhaps has been said of Leigh Hunt's mastery of the picturesque. Word-painting is an art not always looked upon with favour by the austere votaries of form. To those who have a keen sense of niceties of language it must, however, be always a source of the intensest pleasure. A certain measure of attraction it will retain, even when it borders on mere ingenuity,

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but when it rises upon the wings of its own self-delight into the higher levels of emotion, theories can touch it no longer. "The general consent and delight of poetic readers" is, after all, the only true touchstone of poetry. It seems a deplorably indefinite standard, but a better has yet to be found.

The following passage, called by Leigh Hunt "Ariadne waking ; a Fragment," will exemplify the delicacy of the gradation between poetry merely picturesque and poetry in its more spiritual forms :—

"The moist and quiet morn was scarcely breaking,  
When Ariadne in her bower was waking ;  
Her eyelids still were closing, and she heard  
But indistinctly yet a little bird,  
That in the leaves o'erhead, waiting the sun,  
Seemed answering another distant one.  
She waked but stirred not, only just to please  
Her pillow-nestling cheek ; while the full seas,  
The birds, the leaves, the lulling love o'er night,  
The happy thought of the returning light,  
The sweet, self-willed content, conspired to keep  
Her senses lingering in the feel of sleep ;  
And with a little smile she seemed to say,  
'I know my love is near me, and 'tis day.'"

Though there is here no word-painting properly so called, there is not a line that is not purely descriptive, yet the subdued rapture of the treatment moves the reader in a way which might

have been thought impossible to descriptive poetry.

Our next quotation shall be from the "Lines to T. L. H., six years old, during a sickness :"—

"Thy sidelong pillow meekness,  
Thy thanks to all that aid,  
Thy heart in pain and weakness  
Of fancied faults afraid ;  
The little trembling hand  
That wipes thy quiet tears,  
*These, these are things that may demand  
Dread memories for years.*

"To say '*He has departed*'—  
'*His voice*'—'*his face*'—*is gone ;*  
*To feel impatient-hearted,*  
*Yet feel we must bear on ;*  
*Ah, I could not endure*  
*To whisper of such woe,*  
Unless I feel this sleep ensure  
That it will not be so."

The metre here used, with its quick recurrence of rhyme and heavy equability of accent, is finely adopted for the utterance of the emotion which is as placid as despair. Giovanni's lament over his brother's body in the "Story of Rimini" is conceived with a similar emphasis of sorrow.

"But noble passion touched Giovanni's soul :  
He seemed to feel the clouds of habit roll  
Away from him at once, with all their scorn ;  
And out he spoke, in the clear air of morn :—

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‘By heaven, by heaven, and all the better part  
Of us poor creatures with a human heart,  
I trust we reap at last, as well as plough :—  
But there meantime, my brother, liest thou ;  
And Paulo, thou wert the completest knight,  
That ever rode with banner to the fight ;  
And thou wert the most beautiful to see,  
That ever came in press of chivalry ;  
And of a simple man thou wert the best,  
That ever for his friend put spear in rest ;  
And thou wert the most meek and cordial,  
That ever among ladies eat in hall ;  
And thou wert still, for all that bosom gored,  
The kindest man that ever struck with sword.’”

Most of the phraseology of this passage is taken from an old romance, but few, in the face of ancient and modern precedent, will think the less of it on that account.

The concluding lines of the sonnet on Kosciusko are yet more loftily and directly impressive—

“There came a wanderer, borne from land to land  
Upon a couch, pale, many-wounded, mild,  
His brow with patient pain dulcetly sour.  
Men stooped, with awful sweetness, on his hand,  
And kissed it ; *and collected Virtue smiled,*  
*To think how sovereign her enduring hour.”*

The description of Giovanni in the “Story of Rimini” is interesting apart from its cleverness, inasmuch as Lady Byron appears to have told her husband with considerable candour, and probably

with no less insight, that it reminded her of his own character.

“ Bold, handsome, able, if he chose, to please,  
Punctual and right in common offices,  
He lost the sight of conduct’s only worth,  
The scattering smiles on this uneasy earth,  
And on the strength of virtues of small weight,  
Claimed towards himself the exercise of great.  
He kept no reckoning with his sweets and sour,  
He’d hold a sullen countenance for hours,  
And then, if pleased to cheer himself a space,  
Look for the immediate rapture in your face,  
And wonder that a cloud could still be there,  
How small soever, when his own was fair.  
Yet such is conscience, so designed to keep  
Stern central watch, while all things else go sleep,  
That no suspicion would have touched him more  
Than that of wanting on the generous score :  
He would have whelmed you with a weight of scorn,  
Been proud at eve, inflexible at morn,  
In short, ungenerous for a week to come,  
And all to strike that desperate error dumb.”

This lacks the condensation of the characters of Achitophel or Atticus, but it is hardly less subtle and lifelike. The following is in a lighter vein :—

“ There lived a knight, when knighthood was in flower,  
Who charmed alike the tilt-yard and the bower ;  
Young, handsome, blithe, loyal, and brave of course,  
He stuck as firmly to his friend as horse ;  
And only showed, for so complete a youth,  
Somewhat too perfect a regard for truth ;

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He owned 'twas inconvenient, sometimes felt  
A wish 'twere buckled in another's belt,  
Doubted its modesty, its use, its right,—  
Yet, after all, remained the same true knight.  
*So potent is a custom early taught,  
And to such straits may honest men be brought."*

The fresh and quiet humour of the last couplet is as pleasant as one of Dryden's versions of Chaucer. But it is in the more airy exuberance of mirthful trifling that Leigh Hunt is specially at home.

Take, for example, the lines "On seeing a Pigeon make Love."

"Is not the picture strangely like ?  
Doesn't the very bowing strike ?  
Can any art of love in fashion  
Express a more prevailing passion ?  
That air—that sticking to her side—  
That deference, ill-concealing pride,—  
That seeming consciousness of coat,  
And repetition of one note,—  
Ducking and tossing back his head,  
As if at every bow he said,  
'Madam, by heaven, or 'Strike me dead !'

"And then the lady ! look at her :  
What bridling sense of character !  
How she declines and seems to go,  
Yet still endures him to and fro ;  
Carrying her plumes and pretty clothings,  
Blushing stare, and muttered nothings,  
Body plump, and airy feet,  
Like any charmer in a street.



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## Otia—Essays and Reviews

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“Give him a hat beneath his wing,  
And is not he the very thing?  
Give her a parasol or plaything,  
And is not she the very she-thing?”

A reviewer in the *Athenæum* some time ago, after quoting with appreciation Leigh Hunt's line, “April, with his white hands wet with flowers,” added that Leigh Hunt was “decidedly not a great poet.” This is no doubt the current opinion, as far as an opinion on the point is current at all. Yet it is difficult to be quite sure, firstly, on what such opinions are based, and, secondly, what measure of depreciation they are intended to imply.

“And collected Virtue smiled,  
To think how sovereign her enduring hour.”

Few will deny this to be great poetry in any or every sense of the word, full of solemnity and sobriety, and having a special character and music of its own. Probably what is meant is, that such lines are not sufficiently frequent in Leigh Hunt; that the “application of great ideas to life,” which we are now given to understand is the proper business of the poet, is for the most part ignored. Even in the hands of their first authors, these theories of the moral purpose of poetry are apt to become the merest dogmatism. Was Milton, for example, in the wrong, when he delighted in a

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poem so completely unmoral as the "Metamorphoses of Ovid"? And, on the other hand, when these theories "descend into the street," instead of helping the average reader to attend to something which he might otherwise be prone to neglect, they rather tend to confirm him in the desperate condition of the frequenters of the galleries of our theatres, who, as many may lately have had occasion to observe, applaud Cassio's diatribes against drinking with more warmth than anything else in *Othello*.

Leigh Hunt's own opinion on this matter may be inferred from his judgment of Coleridge's poetry, and that it was "on the whole the finest of its time, that is to say, the most quintessential, the most purely emanating from imaginative feeling, unadulterated by 'thoughts' and manner."

Or let us hear him in verse—

"And he's the poet, more or less, who knows  
The charm that hallows the least truth from prose,  
*And dresses it in its mild singing clothes.*"

An exquisite line, which could scarcely be attributed to any one but Leigh Hunt, and which bears us refreshingly away from the neighbourhood of the discontented criticism which refuses to take books as it finds them.

Leigh Hunt's own estimate of his poetical status was the reverse of overweening, but shows his usual discrimination. "I please myself with

thinking that, had the circumstances of my life permitted it, I might have done something a little worthier of acceptance in the way of a mixed kind of narrative poetry, part lively and part serious, somewhere between the longer poems of the Italians and the fabliaux of the old French. My propensity would have been (and oh, had my duties permitted, how willingly would I have passed my life in it ! how willingly now pass it !) to write 'eternal new stories' in verse, of no great length, but just sufficient to vent the pleasure with which I am stung on meeting with some touching adventure, and which haunts me till I can speak of it somehow. I would have dared to pretend to be a servant in the train of Ariosto, nay, of Chaucer,

'and far off his skirts adore.'"

As it is, his best poetical work is limited in quantity, and he must be included in the long list of poets whose infertility is a stock grievance. As he makes Apollo lament—

"There's Collins, it's true, had a good deal to say,  
But the dog had no industry, neither had Gray,"—

and the same might be said, even more truly, of Coleridge and others. On Leigh Hunt's part there was no lack of industry ; but his amiable eagerness to leave the world better than he found it beguiled him into the then dangerous path of

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political journalism, brought him into collision with the law of libel, and was every way unfavourable to free poetical activity. It would be hasty and ungrateful to affirm that the world is none the better for his struggles and sufferings. It may be believed, for instance, that every ill-judged prosecution for libel must have forwarded the legitimate freedom of the press. And if the good that a man does may in any degree be measured by the abuse that he gets for doing it, Leigh Hunt must be ranked very high amongst reformers. "He will live and die," wrote Gifford, in reviewing his poems, "unhonoured in his own generation ; and for his own sake it is to be hoped, moulder unknown in those which are to follow." One cannot but feel that "a very clever, a very honest, and a very good-natured man," to quote Macaulay's description of Leigh Hunt, must have done good to an extent very considerable indeed, to be written of in this fashion.

His occupation as a critic further contributed to withdraw Leigh Hunt from poetry, but this was a distraction scarcely to be regretted. The pleasure of hearing the judgments of a poet on fine specimens of his own art is rare enough to reconcile us to the loss of a certain proportion of his own poetical work, especially when the criticism is not of that barren sort which disdains to dwell upon minutiae of style. In order to be fully alive to the improvement brought about in popular

taste by Leigh Hunt's criticism, it should be remembered that it appeared in days when the criticism in vogue was of the following sort: "The very essence of versification is uniformity; and while anything like versification is preserved, it is evident that uniformity continues to be aimed at. What pleasure is to be derived from an occasional failure in this aim, we cannot exactly understand. It must afford the same gratification, we should imagine, to have one of the buttons on a coat a little larger than the rest, or one or two of the pillars of a colonnade a little out of the perpendicular."

It was against facetious incompetence of this kind that Leigh Hunt defended Keats; in the words of the criticism of the day, "It was he who first puffed the youth into notice in his news-paper." And, to give another example, we have lately been reminded that he was one of the first to welcome the sonnets of Mr. Tennyson Turner.

Leigh Hunt was, in fact, the leader of a school of poetry and criticism, in which Keats was looked upon as a neophyte, which Byron accused of corrupting the tastes of Barry Cornwall, and which was called the cockney school, apparently from a notion that daisies ceased to be daisies when they grew at Hampstead.

Leigh Hunt also occupied himself a good deal with translation, chiefly from the Italian poets, and incurred remonstrances from Shelley on the

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point. "I am sorry to hear," Shelley wrote, "that you have employed yourself in translating 'Aminta,' though I doubt not it will be a just and beautiful translation. You ought to exercise your fancy in the perpetual creation of new forms of gentleness and beauty." Yet here, too, there are compensations. The following, for example, from "Martial," is as good as a morsel of Herrick :

"Underneath this greedy stone  
Lies little sweet Erotion,  
Whom the Fates, with hearts as cold  
Nipped away at six years old.  
Thou, whoever thou mayst be,  
That hast this small field after me,  
Let the yearly rites be paid  
To her little slender shade ;  
So shall no disease or jar  
Hurt thy House, or chill thy Lar ;  
But this tomb be here alone,  
The only melancholy stone."

Leigh Hunt also excelled, as might have been expected, in the rendering of playful passages, such as those in the "Bacchus in Tuscany" or the "Confessions of Goliath."

"I devise to end my days in a tavern drinking,  
May some Christian hold for me the glass when I am  
shrinking  
That the Cherubim may cry, when they see me sinking,  
God be merciful to a soul of this gentleman's way of  
thinking."

I have purposely selected for quotation this urbane version of somewhat hackneyed lines, as it seems to have been ousted in text-books of literature and history—for example, in Mr. Green's "Short History"—by a dull, ridiculous quatrain ending, "God have mercy on this sot, the angels will begin"—an utterance purely savage and shocking, without any touch of pleasantry. No one will doubt that the original is conceived in a jocose vein, however serious the underlying intention may have been. Leigh Hunt found the lines in Camden's "Remains," and no doubt shared Camden's error with respect to the character of Walter Map.

*The Fortnightly Review*, August, 1881.

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*Après*

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**A**ND so your heart is lost—is that your  
news?  
And broken for my sake?  
Well, little things were never hard  
to lose  
Nor brittle things to break.

Yet take the consolation of a friend  
In your so desperate case—  
These little, brittle things are ill to mend,—  
But easy to replace.



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## *The Influence of Place upon Poetry*

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SUCH books as Canon Rawnsley's "Literary Associations of the English Lakes" seem to invite an inquiry whether the environment of poets really does exert a formative influence on their genius and their art—whether it is true to say, as Mr. Leslie Stephen said of Wordsworth and Scott, that one was the poetic child of Lakeland and the other of the Border country. People sometimes talk and write as if there were some local Muse of hill or flat who took possession of her votaries in early youth and swayed their congenital genius into conformity with scenic surroundings. A Calvinistic turn of thought, for instance, has been traced to the influence of a stern and mountainous scenery, but, as a matter of fact, when we look for that tendency among English poets we have to make southwards to the placid Ouse, "that as with molten glass inlays the vale," and find our Calvinist in Cowper. If poets were really in this way the creatures of their surroundings, it is obvious that a statistical disciple of Buckle or Taine could make us a tinted poetical map of the British Islands, after the

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analogy of those provided by geologists. Yellow poets might be found colouring the flats of East Anglia, while a pink poet might be seen to preponderate among the hills of Wales. Such ideas are very soon seen to be purely fanciful. The poet is not the creature and slave of his surroundings. Itinerant or not, he is just a man with a camera. If photographs are to be taken, it is obviously upon neighbouring objects that the camera has to be turned, but within these limits photographer and poet are still themselves; they retain their taste in treatment and their predilections of choice. Shelley, for example, and Keats were both poets of our southern counties, and out of the materials presented to them both they painted pictures quite surprisingly unlike. The images of Keats are mostly solid and palpable—a hare limping through frozen grass—"lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon"—the rank stems of some "pipy hemlock" growing in a ditch—in such things he delighted and described them with a Dutch minuteness. Shelley, on the other hand, was Turneresque; he desired the misty and diaphanous; he cared more for the "rainbows of the brooks" than for the brooks themselves, and in his hands the warm palpitating skylark becomes an "embodied abstraction." And so also when Wordsworth—the poet, be it remembered, not only of the Lakes, but also of Wood Street, Cheapside, and of the Thames at Richmond—

when Wordsworth crosses Westminster Bridge, he has got his Wordsworthian camera with him—the camera which had photographed so many mountains only because it was among mountains that Wordsworth happened to be born.

“Dear God ! The very houses seem asleep,  
And all that mighty heart is lying still.”

He gropes as characteristically in London as in Lakeland for the unseizable soul behind the visual image—just as, when an undergraduate in the flats of Cambridgeshire, his fancy had transfigured into mystery the statue of

“Newton with his prism and silent face  
Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone.”

The term “Lake poet” had indeed never any valuable meaning and never implied any intelligent literary criticism. Coleridge went there in pursuit of Wordsworth, Southey in pursuit of Coleridge ; and so with the rest of that most motley crowd—types as divergent as Gray and Ruskin—who have been either dwellers or visitors in Canon Rawnsley’s “bit of mountain ground twenty miles in diameter.” It is much in the same way that little groups of painters become associated with irrelevant accidents of birthplace or locality, but art criticism as such has no legitimate interest in the fact that Old Crome painted in the neighbourhood of Norwich, or that Millet imagined and

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composed his "Angelus" at the little village of Barbizon; and so in poetry, when Tennyson appeals to his "dewy dawn of Memory" in the Lincolnshire levels, he gets quite as much emotion out of "The poplars four that grew beside his father's door" as ever Scott or Wordsworth could get out of the mighty Helvellyn. It may perhaps occur to some to think vaguely of Ossian—of the Keltic spirit in general—of the fact that the hills of this island lie mostly to the westward—and so to persuade themselves that poetry, like the Liberty of Milton or the Love of Vergil's shepherd, is by right an inhabitant of the rocks. In reality, however, the Keltic spirit is not local but racial, and is as likely to flourish in the flat pastures of Meath as at the Giant's Causeway. The Keltic spirit has been edged continually westward by a sort of "law of westward drift," because the tides of invasion have set in upon Britain from the eastward side. If our invaders had been launched upon us from the side of the sunset, we might have found the Pan-Keltic Congress taking place not in Dublin but at Norwich, and the Spaniards of the Armada storm-driven to leave their traces on the Western Irish coast would not have been an exception, but a type.

Reflection, to sum up the whole matter, soon brings us to the conclusion that for poets, of all people in the world, the mind is its own place. The *locus classicus* of complaint against a supposed

unfriendly environment is probably the grumble of Herrick vegetating in a dull Devonshire vicarage, instead of carousing with Ben Jonson at the "Dog" or "Triple Tun."

"Yet justly, too, I must confess  
I ne'er invented such  
Ennobled numbers for the press  
Than where I loath'd so much."

Even after this confession we must still largely discount the writer's discontent, for if ever a man took obvious delight in rural incidents, from the laden hock-cart to the hen going to lay her "long white egg," that gloriously self-convicted poet was Herrick himself.

There would seem to be but one class of poet who has real reason to complain of his surroundings, and that is the poet who has been long in populous city pent. It is noticeable in this connection that Wordsworth's famous Westminster sonnet was written when the city was for the nonce πόλις ἄπολις—a city of the apparently dead. The muse of song, as well as of sketch, might hopefully visit Lord Macaulay's perching New Zealander. It may be objected that some of the very finest verse—"Paradise Lost" may stand for example—has been written in this City of London. It is enough to say in answer that the sightless poet of the sun that set and the twilight that stole over Paradise had many memories upon which to draw—he had watched the sunsets

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## *The Influence of Place upon Poetry*

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of Horton, which, *pace* the Lake enthusiasts, are just as inspiring as those of Windermere. Nor let it be forgotten that our earlier poets had not to walk nearly as far north as Oxford Street to find themselves among green fields. Even Thomson the indolent might easily reach "some eminence, Augusta, in thy plains" from which he could "taste the smell of dairy." It may be added that when we get poems with titles professedly urban—Mr. Davidson's "Fleet Street Eclogues" and Alexander Smith's "City Poems" are the first instances that come to mind—we are generally transported into the country at express speed. These City poets have a most disproportionable quantity of *rus* in their *urbs*. We do not, of course, forget that for more than a century our poets were indeed poets of the town, and far be it from us to belittle the Muse of Ombre and frothing chocolate and sylphs that were "wedged whole ages in a bodkin's eye." Whether Pope was a poet has always seemed to us the most barren of questions, since he was at all events a most magnificent writer. But we have only to turn to any chance quotation that is at all representative of the bulk of our best poetry—

"The green-robed senators of mighty woods,

Tall oaks branch-charméd by the earnest stars"—

to find how far we have got from the eighteenth century and the author of "Windsor Forest." We were amused the other day by a remark in

this connection of one of Pope's earlier biographers. It ought to be remembered, says Ruffhead, that when Pope wrote his poem, Windsor Forest had "no magnificent lakes or cascades, no elegant structures, or other beauties with which royal taste and magnificence has since embellished it." To Ruffhead the cascade at Virginia Water was a much more poetic object than a moonlit oak or a clamorous lapwing. The so-called "local poetry" of which "Windsor Forest" is the type—the poetry of which Longfellow made a collection in his "Poems of Places"—need not detain us long, for it is local only in name. Any navigable river would have done as well for Denham as the Thames, and the thrush have sung as sweetly to Dyer on any other hill as on that of Grongar. One real connection between place and poetry has indeed been noticed in the poems of all ages—the extraordinary hold which the scenery of their youth has upon the imaginations of the dying. The heart "pants to the place from whence at first she flew" "et dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos." Or, to quote from the short poem in which, to our thinking, Stevenson came as near as he ever did to high poetry, we get some exile of the Tropics dreaming of the cool shores

"Where around the graves of the martyrs the whaups  
are crying  
His heart remembers how!"

*Saturday Review*, March, 15, 1902.

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## *A Debutante*

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**W**AXEN cheeks and flaxen hair—  
Why, 'tis marketable ware !  
Take it quickly, little maid,  
To Society's arcade ;  
There thy playmates sit arow,  
A demure seraglio—  
Sit arow and twirl their thumbs,  
Till the long-pursed puppet comes.

Take thy puppet. Better thus.  
What hast thou to do with us ?  
Us, beyond thy girlish ken !  
Unintelligible men !  
Lips too cynically curled  
At thy own so serious world !  
Laughter with a ribald ring  
Past thy angel fathoming !

Yet I wrong thee, child. Forgive  
Scorn that is but fugitive.  
Yes, those eyes of blissful blue  
Might, alas ! be tearful too ;—



In thy puppet's veering mood—  
In the cares of motherhood—  
They shall bring thee, shall the years,  
Opportunity of tears.

Never talk of tears to-day—  
Let us chatter and be gay !  
Shun the miserably wise,  
And on frocks philosophize !  
So when Buszard's minions make,  
Darling doll, thy bridal cake,  
Thou shalt find my fancy treading  
Merry measures at thy wedding !

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## *Rhymers of Isis and Cam\**

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**C** S. C., J. K. S.—what happy memories of harmless amusement do such initials evoke! The entire works of the “beloved Cambridge rhymers,” as J. K. S. called him, are here presented in one convenient and well-printed volume, with a portrait of the author and an interesting memorial preface by Sir Walter Sendall, his contemporary and friend. Sir Walter does, it is true, permit himself the trite phrase that “what will be Calverley’s permanent position in literature is a question which must be settled by the critics.” His place in literature will of course be determined, not by critics, who have never been in a position to make any such settlement, but by the common consent of those whom the ever-luminous Bagehot described as “the distant people whom we call posterity.” In the case of Calverley we are ourselves beginning to be those distant people. Although he died as late as 1884 he was at his characteristic best fifty years ago, and the fashions, literary and other, of

\* “The Complete Works of C. S. Calverley.” London; Bell, 1901. “The Book of the Horace Club. 1898-1901.” Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1901.

his youth are not likely to prejudice or prepossess us to-day. We were under a wrong impression that Calverley's popularity, as evidenced by the demand for his books, had undergone at one time a period of eclipse ; but the sixteen editions of "Verses and Translations," and the eighteen editions of "Fly Leaves" here enumerated in a bibliographical note, seem to have followed each other in a continuous stream. *Volvitur et volvatur!* and yet when admiring criticism addresses itself to the task, not of making reputations, but of accounting for them, it is not at first sight easy to see why Calverley holds so unassailable a place in every "lettered heart."

In the first place, Calverley is one of the "*vitiis imitabiles*"—or, to put it in a more complimentary way, many of his mannerisms have been so often and, at a first glance, so successfully copied that they might conceivably have begun to pall. Calverley, for example, popularized, if he did not invent, that truncation of the last line of a quatrain to which a not unpleasing turn of novelty is given by one of the "Horace Club" writers :—

" 'Twas in Throgmorton Street we met,  
We were two fools and one promoter,  
And Jones and I shall ne'er forget

Floater.

Yes, Floater was his name ; he penned  
A very readable prospectus,  
But that was just what in the end  
Wrecked us."

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## *Rhymers of Isis and Cam*

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There is, of course, more of it. "Q," another initial pleasant to remember, has been a successful parodist both of this and of another of Calverley's pet devices—the habit, namely, of hitching into fluent rhyme phrases usually confined to the prosiest of prose.

"My infallible proceeding  
Is to wake and think of you."

"Give no inconsiderable sum"

may serve for examples. Again, the fact that Calverley lived in the epoch of the mid-Victorian charade and, like Dryden's McFlecknoe, "chose for his command a peaceful province in acrostic land" must surely have tended to lessen him in the eyes of a later age. What can be more disenchanting in the middle of a bit of real Calverley—

"Hie thee to the breezy common where the melancholy  
goose  
Stalks and the astonished donkey finds that he is really  
loose."

than to be confronted in the next line with "My Whole," and invited to bore ourselves with the answer. Riddles and charades may be all very well, but mere neatness of versification is all that they demand. Calverley's muse was too good for the work. One can but say that his putting some of his best writing into these obsolete puerilities

was perhaps an instance of the modesty of true merit. Fine and ingenious literary fooling, such as that of Hood, is welcome enough; but the wish to guess a charade merely as such is surely characteristic of rudimentary or suburban minds—and Calverley's charades from that point of view are not even difficult to solve. The same thing, in a lesser degree, would seem to be true of the surprise poems of the "For she was a water-rat" order. In these, however, Calverley rose at times to a pitch of excellence that half reconciles us to the genre—we may instance the lines about the S. John's Wood Omnibus. The poem on the clerk reading his paper in Caermarthen Bay perhaps hardly comes under this category; we have always regarded it as a very real poem in which the comedy keeps oddly trembling into pathos.

In spite of all objections and deductions, we are no less firmly persuaded of the greatness of Calverley than is his sympathetic biographer, who has evidently felt the same difficulty in explaining it that we feel, and can really tell us little more than that there is a sort of a "quiddity" about Calverley's verse. It is perhaps not much more explanatory, but it is certainly true, to say that his sense of humour was more heartfelt, more real and rollicking, than that of many of his rival rhymesters. The lines, for instance, about "Floater" to which we referred are good reading

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## *Rbymers of Isis and Cam*

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enough—they make us smile—but they do not carry us off our feet. Take, on the other hand—

“Wherefore fly to her, swallow,  
And mention that I’d ‘follow,’  
And ‘pipe and trill’ etcetera, till  
I died had I but wings :  
Say the North’s ‘true and tender,’  
The South an old offender,  
And hint in fact with your well-known tact  
All kinds of pretty things.

Say I grow hourly thinner,  
Simply abhor my dinner—  
Tho’ I do try and absorb some viand  
Each day for form’s sake merely :  
And ask her when all’s ended,  
And I am found extended  
With vest blood-spotted and cut carotid,  
To think on Hers sincerely.”

Such writing is as irresistible as Peg Woffington’s fiddle. C. S. C. managed to get into his verse that buoyant personality which made him jump twice running—because the first time he did not alight upon his feet—out of the schoolyard into the “milling-ground” at Harrow—a performance which old Harrovians will appreciate. In the lines—

“Love me, bashful fairy !  
I’ve an empty purse ;  
And I’ve ‘moods,’ which vary  
Mostly for the worse”—

was perhaps an instance of the most  
 merit. First and ingenious literary  
 as that of Elton, is welcome enough  
 with us, given a character merely as such  
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 that Calverley's instance,  
 "Chis" is a good

to be like us smile—last day—oh, my  
 when first. Take, on the other hand—

There is a lot, however,  
 to be said for "I. I." indeed,  
 as "you and will" coming, still  
 You will last night:  
 have North's "you and will,"  
 To look at all children,  
 but he is far with your well-known last  
 I look at your things

by your hands, indeed,  
 like after my dinner—  
 To I. I. and North's "you and will"  
 but he is far with your well-known last  
 but he is far with your well-known last  
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we observe the misprint "worst." We had forgotten that this stanza was not by Mr. Gilbert, and it is certainly much in his manner.

As regards Calverley's extraordinary command of Latin verse, it appears that the late Bishop of Durham thought the Oxford prize poem on *The Parthenon* the finest Latin composition of its time. Fresh from a first reading of this and its companion Cambridge poem "*Australia*"—for Calverley held this double record—we refuse to believe, in spite of all scepticism about poetry in a dead language, that Horace would not have read them with pleasure. We have also made our first acquaintance here with Calverley's excellent remarks on the futility of English Elegiacs with their pentameter endings of what we may call the "dickory dickory dock" pattern. C. S. C. observes that such an ending could probably not be found in all Latin poetry. He had forgotten the "*dictaque factaque sunt*" of Catullus, which, however, is no doubt the exception that proves the rule. Nor does it, as he thought, seem to be quite impossible to write an English pentameter ending. Robinson Ellis' phrase "*houses a grim denizen*" seems to be a good equivalent in sound to such a phrase as "*ibat Hamadryasin*." But here too the luck is so exceptional that it is hardly worth while to bid for it. As well might a man devote a lifetime to the attempt to catch dace over a pound weight.

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## *Rhymers of Isis and Cam*

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"The Book of the Horace Club" is somewhat after the model of the Dublin Kottabos—grave and gay—Latin, Greek, and English. It is a prettily bound memorial of the club's poetical recreations, and if we single out for applause the verses of H. B., that is not to assert that there are not others as good. We must, however, ask for a crib to the following stanza from the introductory sapphics prefixed to the volume by an author who gives no initials:—

"Carmina interdum facimus jocosæ  
Sive sedatæ magis obloquentes  
O uti insulso citharæ carenti  
Quam sale nigro."

We pored long over this, and it still seems to us like the hatter's remark. If we dimly apprehend the writer's meaning, he seems to have said the exact opposite of what he meant.

We mentioned "J. K. S." at the beginning of this review, and we are sorry to find that his verses are out of print. Not only was he, speaking generally, one of the most distinctively individual of university rhymers, but, in the realm of parody, his Browning caricature "Birthdays? Yes, in a general way—" etc., is perhaps not surpassed even by Calverley in "The Cock and the Bull."

*Saturday Review*, September 21, 1901.

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## *Epigram*

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### ON A CERTAIN EMENDATION OF HERMANN'S.

“ **O**N Bion's page the tale already known is  
How a Greek boar did mutilate  
Adonis ;  
But now, of that same beast a  
worthy scion,  
This German bore has mutilated Bion.”

[“I will wind up this scrawl *à la* literary man by quoting an epigram I wrote the other day. Hermann introduced an unjustifiable alteration into Bion's poem about Adonis ('At haud ita scripsit Bio,' say she with the ineffable complacency of the moderns), on which I wrote thus” (above).

From a letter of Mr. Kent to Mr. Speneer Pickering.]

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## *Propertius Naturalized\**

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**W**E do not know whether Mr. Tremenheere is absolutely the first to hit upon the happy idea of translating Propertius into lively octosyllabics instead of the old rhetorical heroic couplet. In the last century it was oddly believed that the true equivalent of elegiacs was the quatrain of "*Annus Mirabilis*," a metre so intolerably languid that, in spite of all that was written in it before and after Gray, it hardly survives for us except in the "*Elegy*" of Gray himself. Conington made an experiment a little analogous to that before us when he put the *Æneid* into the metre of "*Marmion*," but, though he gained the rapidity of movement at which he aimed, the chivalric associations of the metre were too disenchantingly incongruous. Against Swiftian couplets no such objection is to be made, and we suppose that translators have been deterred from using them by the fact that, as we are reminded by Mr. Tremenheere, "into their sixteen syllables has to be packed the sense

\* "*The Cyathia of Propertius*." Being the first book of his Elegies. Done into English verse by Seymour Greig Tremenheere. London : Macmillan. 1899.

which in the Latin occupies some twenty-eight." Nevertheless, and although in only two places is the Propertian couplet here expanded into four lines, we cordially allow Mr. Tremenheere's claim that he seldom omits any part of the sense, and as for his gains in the way of briskness and readability, they are immense.

"You've colour yet, your blood's lukewarm,  
Your fever's still in latent form.  
Ere long a tigress you would track  
Or gladlier roll Ixion's rack,  
Than, pricked by Cupid through and through,  
A froward damsel's bidding do."

Set against this a version published in 1870 which we happen to have at hand as we write—

"Then with fierce tigers would'st thou rather go,  
Or tempt the tortures of the wheel below,  
Than feel the love-shaft rankling in thy bones,  
Or quail before the fair one's angry tones."

"Armenias cupies accedere tiges" is here almost mistranslated, and, in any case, a little of this stilted verse goes a very long way, whereas Mr. Tremenheere's natural utterances—

"To view the seat of Grecian lore  
And Asia's rich old towns explore  
Would cost too dear, if Cynthia rail  
And scratch my face before I sail"—

are not only wonderfully close and accurate

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## *Propertius Naturalized*

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renderings of Propertius, whose Latin, by the way, is throughout printed opposite to the English, but are also as easy to read as Prior. This unpedantic versification—strange how great a difference the little “*pes surreptus*” makes—while admirably suitable to the poet’s lighter moods, might, likely enough, be found too flippant for the lips of Paullus’ Cornelia ; but, after all, the field of choice is wide and we should like to see Mr. Tremenheere try his hand at some of Ovid. He is no doubt right in thinking that the cadences of Propertius, whose delight in his own metre and love for beautifully sounding words such as “*æquoribus*” are always so charmingly in evidence, cannot be transferred to English ; and in this respect Ovid has less to lose. Propertius generally goes far to persuade a reader that Ovid did very much the same harm to the pentameter that Pope did to the couplet. However that may be, it is pleasant to observe that these graceful and fascinating recreations of scholarship are lasting out the century.

*Saturday Review*, January 6, 1900.

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## *Chatter about Clodia\**

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“**W**HO will read this book?” says Mr. Macnaghten, in his mawkishly plaintive preface. “Perhaps,” he goes on, “even an Eton boy, or the sister of an Eton boy, if I may speak out all my dreams, who has read in Tennyson of ‘the tenderest of Roman poets,’ and would learn something which her brother refuses to tell of that Catullus, ‘whose dead songster never dies.’ May it be so!” With a passing nod of approbation to the diplomatic brother, and a passing wonderment as to where the materials for anything like a “Story of Catullus” can be found, we resign ourselves to expect yet another version of the Sparrow—of what Robinson Ellis called the “puny pinnacle”—of the superfluous h’s of Arrius. But not at all. The interest is to be made to centre in Catullus as a lover—the lover of Clodia Clytemnestra Quadrantaria. “There has been no love poetry like his till we come to

\* “The Story of Catullus,” by H. Macnaghten. London: Duckworth. 1899. “Poems of Catullus,” selected and edited by H. V. Macnaghten and A. B. Ramsay. London: Duckworth. 1899.

'Romeo and Juliet,' and there has been nothing since to rival it, not even Mrs. Browning's sonnets and Tennyson's 'Maud.'" Let us say at once that a point of view apter to mislead the Eton boy's sister, and to shock his father, can seldom have presented itself to an Eton Master and Fellow of Trinity. The father will be shocked not, of course, at anything in connection with Catullus, much of whose life he has only too likely—albeit a plain man and no poet—lived over again for himself. He will be shocked at the canting falsity of presentment which the point of view is bound to imply.

The example innocently set by Sir Theodore Martin with his Horace, the parent of the "Ancient Classics" series, culminates in such writing as we find here—not open legitimate travesty such as Horace "at Hawarden" or "in London," but a system of foisting upon the unfortunate dead a whole set of virtues, vices, and states of mind which they could never have known, because, as Charles Reade said of sobriety in the eighteenth century, they were not yet invented. "Some women might have saved him and shown him the truth." "If only Cicero had chosen Catullus for his son-in-law, we should have lost Lesbia's sparrow and Lesbia's kisses, but we should have gained nobler poems, inspired by a good woman's love." One does not quite see why Tullia should not have had the kisses and



the sparrow too—but to proceed. Cicero, in spite of the “outrageous language,” which he “never hesitated to use,” was “a model of propriety,” but Ovid and Martial were “notoriously bad men.” What says Macaulay, just after reading Ovid right through? “He seems to have been a very good fellow.” Strange disagreement of these Cambridge worthies. A poet who commanded the sympathetic interest of Macaulay and the sincerest flattery of the pure-minded Milton, is, to Mr. Macnaghten, just a “bad man.” Ovid, we remember, once appeared in a vision to Professor Munro. It would be amusing to see him appear to Mr. Macnaghten and ask to be “shown the truth.”

If there is one thing obvious, we will not say to students, but to ordinary level-headed readers of the Roman love-poets, it is this—that the ideal of love described in “Aurora Leigh,” or Coventry Patmore’s “Angel in the House,” was entirely out of their ken. To them, as to Sedley, the whole sex could but afford the handsome and the kind. “*Castas odisse puellas et nullo vivere consilio*” was their motto and practice. When they singed their wings, as many a man is singeing them somewhere at this very hour, they went through the usual routine of “*perfida cara tamen*,” “*odi et amo*,” and the rest of it. Catullus alone, having a thousand-fold more than other men the “feeling heart and the fine understanding,” put it all into immortal verse, like the magnificent poet

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## *Chatter about Clodia*

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he was. They are indeed, in Pope's phrase, "well-sung" woes; but when all is said and done, the sorrows, like the joys, are still the sorrows of the—well, they are not the joys and sorrows of the English homes which sheltered the "Angel of the House"—no, nor even of the humbler lodging of that lesser "Angel of Light," who kept tryst with Albert FitzAllen beneath the London lamp-post.

"Non jam illud quæro, contra ut me diligat illa,  
Aut, quod non potis est, esse pudica velit."

To talk of such loves as these in connection with Maud or Juliet is no better than an outrage, and we are inclined even to think that Professor Sellar a little overstepped the mark in quoting Matthew Arnold's line, "The pageant of his bleeding heart." One may not altogether respect Byron's griefs, but they were on a bigger scale than those of Catullus in this one sorry business of Clodia.

"Ipse valere opto et tetrum hunc deponere morbum"

was the view of the poet himself, and it is one of his glories to have been, as far as can be judged from his poems, an exceptionally healthy and all-round human being, "vincula qui rupit dedoluitque semel." It is, no doubt, a pity that a man as honest and affectionate as Scott, as playful and charming as Lamb, a poet fit to cap

felicities with Keats or bandy lampoons with Dryden—should perforce have occupied so much of a little volume with an adventure so unhappy, and it is natural to speculate—though it is rather like making imaginary matches for Cicero's daughter—on the great potentialities of a poet who died long before he was forty ; but, in the mean time, "his greatness, not his littleness, concerns mankind," and we think that Catullus resistant—

"Difficile est, verum hoc qualubet efficias"—

is a much more inspiring spectacle for an Eton boy, or his sister either, than Catullus philandering. By no other word can we call it—and, except that both are poetry, we do most stoutly refuse to recognize the slightest affinity between the *Basiationes* and the *Sonnets* from the Portuguese.

Not to end too seriously, we will communicate a discovery. If we put C. for Catullus, one of the author's sentences reads thus : "Lucretius was unknown as yet, though ten years older than C. ; Vergil was a child of eight—Horace a baby of three." 62 B.C. is the year referred to. It will be observed that we have here a metrical *memoria technica* which we leave to be elaborated by those whom it more concerns.

*Saturday Review*, November 25, 1899.

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## *Vergil as Magician\**

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**I**T has, perhaps, become matter of common knowledge among general readers of to-day that Vergil came to be considered in the Middle Ages as having been a worker of miracles, so much so that in one or two of the stories here given "A Vergil" is used as a generic term for a sorcerer. With the real Vergil these stories of wizardry have, of course, nothing to do. The country of the Renaissance merely attributed to a great national poet, buried in a well-known tomb close to a storied grotto, the marvels and miracles which were the favourite food of the mediæval mind. It is true that when Vergil wrote—

"Limus ut hic durescit et hæc ut cera liquescit  
Uno eodemque igni, sic nostro Daphnis amore"—

he was, no doubt, recording, jingle and all, a contemporary peasant incantation exactly resembling many of those in Mr. Leland's book; but he recorded it, of course, only in the same literary spirit as Gay records a similar incantation in the "Shepherd's Week." Another rhymed

\* "The Unpublished Legends of Virgil," collected by C. G. Leland. London: Elliot Stock. 1899.

Latin spell, dating from Varro's time, may be seen quoted in a pleasant article on a "Prose Source of the Georgics," in the December number of the *Contemporary Review*.

Mr. Leland believes, and no doubt he is right, that many of the legends which he has here collected are of quite immemorial antiquity, and are, in fact, part of the national stock of folk-lore upon which Ovid drew in writing the "Metamorphoses" and the "Fasti," and for the origin of which we must go back to the Eastern cradle of the Græco-Latin races. Mr. Leland goes so far as to think that "there is probably not one of the old Neapolitan Vergilian stories which is not of Oriental origin." He makes this remark apropos of the story that Vergil drove all the flies out of Rome by converting into an image of gold as large as a frog, and placing in the church of S. Peter (the stories are all quite vague in the matter of historical date) a certain minor deity called "Il Moscone"—a sort of Beelzebub, or King of Flies. In return for this service, Vergil is said to have asked for the hand of "the Emperor's" niece, with a dowry of a hundred thousand crowns. In all these queer legends, of which the above may serve for a specimen, it is observable that Vergil is never portrayed as an unkindly or mischievous magician—a characteristic which may or may not imply some true tradition of his personality.

These folk-lore legends are comparable, in Mr. Leland's view, to the osseous and igneous relics of primæval man ; the Tylers of the future will keenly deplore the disappearance from among the people of these oral traditions. It is unfortunate in this regard that their older reporters, such as Gervais of Tilbury, and Neckham, to whom style and the "story" were all in all, left out the most really interesting things. "Thus Lorenzo Selva gives a witch story, with six incantations, which are far more interesting than all the washy poetry in his book, but is so ashamed of having done so, that he states in a marginal note that he has only preserved them to give an idea of the silliness 'of all such iniquitous trash'—the 'iniquitous trash' in question being evidently of Etrusco-Roman origin, to judge from form and similarity to other ancient spells."

Such books as Mr. Leland's the lover of folk-lore may be trusted to find for themselves, but they who are lovers of fairy-stories pure and simple, will find many good ones here, all of them artistically told, and some of them of great ethical interest. From a scientific point of view, it might perhaps be wished that the author had given us a more explicit account of how, and by whom, these stories were committed to memory or to paper, beyond the bare statement that "they were nearly all taken down by a fortune-teller or witch among her kind." But even they who care nothing for

scientific folk-lore, nor even for fairy-stories, may find here many curious items of information and criticism. Whether the accomplished author of "Hans Breitmann" knows much about Ibsen, we may take leave to doubt ; but here is a note upon truffles which he gives in connection with the story that it was Vergil who first introduced "the Emperor" to an *omelette aux truffes*. "An incredible quantity of so-called truffles, which appear thinly sliced or in small bits in dishes even in first-class hotels or restaurants all over Europe, are nothing but burned potatoes, or similar vegetable carbon, flavoured sometimes with extract of mushrooms, but much oftener are simply tasteless soft coal."

*Saturday Review*, February 17, 1900.

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### *Inscription*

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[Mr. Harold Peto had asked for an inscription for a sundial he was putting up in the garden of his country house.]

“**E**FFICE lux tenebras. Umbram fac,  
Phœbe, petenti :  
Ipse petens umbram sis sine nube,  
Peto.”



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## *A Lost Poet \**

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“**H**OW good a poet was in Mallock lost!” is an echo of eighteenth-century verse which may commend itself to some of those who can think back to the early days of the “New Republic”—a book which the critics, for some reason or other, never laid themselves out to praise, but which the public has never allowed to be out of print. We find it difficult to believe that the public ever will. Epigram and parody are buoyant things in the stream of time, and, apart from its enduring interest as a picture of religious and social thought twenty-five years ago, enough feeling underlay the epigrams to prevent our mistaking them for the mere *facetiae* which are too flippant not to be ephemeral. But, to keep to what we have more immediately in mind, there seemed also to be evidences of no little command of verse.

“One was Queen Venus, blown for my delight  
Across the blue sea in a rosy shell.”

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\* “Lucretius on Life and Death, in the Metre of Omar Khayyám,”  
by W. H. Mallock. London: Black. 1900.

The author of the melodious sonnet in which that phrase occurs—the author of the lines which we may call “Margaret,” and of other snatches of song, seemed to be telling the dogs of that day that he who wrote these could write more. Nevertheless, any one who hastened in that faith to buy Mr. Mallock’s subsequent volume of poems was much disappointed. The volume admittedly consisted merely of *primitiæ* retrieved from schoolboy notebooks, and

“The long loose laugh of the wild woodpecker”

is the only line which our memory at this moment retains. And there, too, upon the title-page was the lugubrious motto from Matthew Arnold—“The mount is mute, the channel dry”—warning us to expect no more poetry. Matthew Arnold, who had a way of writing with one foot on prose and one on verse, completed the quatrain in his characteristic manner—

“The mount is mute, the channel dry—  
And down he lays his weary bones!”

Mr. Mallock has unhappily permitted himself to exemplify a phrase which he would hardly have brought himself to write. Like Clough, he laid down his weary bones halfway up the hill of Helicon, and one can only conclude that he did so for the reasons given in a set of joco-serious verses which he addressed some eight years ago to Miss Margot Tennant of that day—

“For you Life’s a garden, whose vista discloses  
The Heavens at the end ; but it looms on our sight  
Like a thicket of briars with a few withered roses,  
And beyond is the night, is the night, is the night !”

“Nox dormienda”—“linquenda Tellus”—these are the sad headings to our psalms of life which would seem to have disheartened the muse of Mr. Mallock and set him upon his curious task of persuading other people to hide an ostrich head in the sands of Romanism. That the inability to unravel the “master knot of human fate” does not necessarily still the voice of poetry Omar Khayyám and many others bear witness, but we are convinced of its benumbing effect upon some minds. Lewis Carroll, in the preface to “Sylvie and Bruno,” went so far as to express surprise that a man who held the beliefs of Horace should ever have smiled again ; but, on the other hand, when Mr. Edwardes, in “Boswell,” tried to be a philosopher, “cheerfulness was always stepping in,” and it is wonderful what logical difficulties a congenital twist of nature can surmount.

Readers who agree with us in our estimate of Mr. Mallock’s powers of verse, will share our pleasure that Lucretius has withdrawn him for a moment from the paths of prose. If we are not mistaken, Mr. Mallock has already edited Lucretius in the “Ancient Classics” series, and to make this close poetical paraphrase—mostly from the third book—must have been to him a pleasant

and familiar occupation. We do not think that he has been judicious in using such Christian phraseology as the "peace that passeth understanding," or "come unto me all ye that labour." His idea has been to emphasize the "strange contrast between the gospel of science, which, in the days of Lucretius, as in our own, had no hope to offer us but that of eternal death, and the gospel of the Christian religion, which offers us eternal life." We think, however, the contrast is obvious enough without this bizarre way of calling attention to it, and the biblical quotations not only have to our ears the ring of anachronism and falsetto, but may also mislead English readers into conjecturing this paraphrase to be much less faithful to the original than it really is. We have noticed little for which a Lucretian equivalent might not be found. The sonorous and forcible rhetoric of this version is very enjoyable, and when we come upon such a phrase as—

" And other seas in turn  
Mow with their scythes of whiteness other bays"—

we can but revert to the lament with which we began this review.

*Saturday Review*, July 21, 1900.

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## *Ballade of the Ballade*

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**F**OR years I bade the Muse go hang—  
“Of verse,” quoth I, “the town  
is sick ;”

But Mr. Gosse and Mr. Lang  
Have shown me how to do the trick ;  
Why any Harry, Tom or Dick,  
Can find the straw in 'eighty-three,  
To make this new poetic brick—  
This *ballade* with a final *e*.

Real poems cost me many a pang—  
I used to lick them and re-lick,  
And sometimes, in a pet, I rang  
The bell and swore the ink was thick ;  
But any theme you like to pick  
Will do to-day for you and me  
To put on paper straight and slick  
A *ballade* with a final *e*.

It's far more easy than go-bang,  
At which, indeed, I was not quick ;  
And since the men who really sang  
Have passed their “grand climacteric,”

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## *Ballade of the Ballade*

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And since the British public kick  
At graver forms of poetry,  
To ballads I intend to stick—  
To *ballades* with a final *e*.

### L'ENVOI.

At these, O Prince, thy ears up-prick,  
And let thy seat of empire be,  
For *ballade* reasons, Hackney Wick,  
These *ballades* with a final *e*.

*The World*, August 15, 1883.

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## *Aristophanes Naturalized\**

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**W**ITH the exception perhaps of Lucian, Aristophanes seems to be the only Greek of antiquity over whom a modern reader may laugh heartily to himself in solitude. That amiable sceptic as to the merits of the classics, the late James Payn, was perhaps not unnaturally much depressed by Paley's collection of Greek wit, but even he would surely have been amused by the version before us. To Englishmen it is a special charm of Aristophanes that he is not only laughable but characteristically English in his vein of comicality. The whole tenor of their education produces in Englishmen a certain specialized delight in the discomfiture of "rotters." We know what sort of answer would await the school-boy who, when asked whether So-and-so was at home, should reply like the Euripidean porter—

οὐκ ἔνδον ἔνδον ἔστιν εἰ γνώμην ἔχεις.

Even in these mild days he would be forcibly reminded that this is not a "way we have in the

\* "The Comedies of Aristophanes," edited and metrically translated by B. Bickley Rogers. Vol. V. : *Frogs, Ecclesiazusæ*. London : Bell, 1902.

public schools" of answering callers. In the mind of Aristophanes, Euripides was not only like his own porter *λάλος*, a "rotter," but he was also *πανούργος*, a "wrong 'un." It says much for the comic genius of the poet that he was not obliged to run riot in mere abuse of a poetry and a philosophy which he honestly thought of evil influence, but was also able to make men so great as Socrates and Euripides so supremely ridiculous.

Induced by this volume to re-read "Aristophanes' Apology" with its cranky spelling, it struck us that this spelling is just exactly one of those affectations which a typical English education makes ludicrous and distasteful in after life. When a boy has learned not to say that So-and-so is both at home and not at home, he will be less likely to think in after years that he has achieved something valuable by writing "Athenai" instead of "Athens" and "Pnux" instead of "Pnyx." Grote, the principal English exponent of this craze, was a schoolboy, it seems, at the Charterhouse, but he left school at sixteen. As for Browning, we must think considerably less of his authority on such a point when we find him writing—

"In spite of Theramenes and his like"—

just as a certain ill-starred dramatist once perpetrated the line—

"Of young Charmides and the Academe."



These false quantities do not make for humility in protest. The spelling in question seems to be very dear to the shallower sort of American scholars, to whose pages it gives an air of erudition at a cheap rate.

When George III. was told of somebody's apology for Christianity, he naïvely observed that he had not been aware that it required an apology—and something of the sort occurred to us in re-reading Browning's poem. We cannot, of course, impute to a poet all the opinions of his puppets, but it really does seem that the protests put in the mouth of Balaustion against the indecours of comedy are not only, as is obvious, quite factitious and anachronistic, but are also of a more violent sincerity than might have been expected of a poet who could find in Rabelais that "jolly chapter" which James Payn failed to find.

"I heard Lusistraté.

Waves, said to wash pollution from the world,  
Take that plague memory," etc.

With one part of his mind Browning certainly seems to have meant this—and perhaps the reason may be that he was not, when one thinks of it, a great master of the merely ludicrous. To be simply and cheerily laughable is the only palliation of indecorum, and people sit in judgment on this or that author—on Rabelais or on Aristophanes—accordingly as they individually find less risibility

in the one than the other. We may add that Mr. Rogers has shown immense literary tact in Anglicizing scabrous passages without offence.

Speaking of the book generally, it is difficult to be grateful enough to Mr. Rogers for his really splendid labours of love and learning. Not only does he seem to have waded through all the commentators, but he has brought to bear upon them a knowledge of the world and a sense of literature which commentators have not always possessed. Conington once went in all seriousness to Jowett to ask him whether he thought it impossible that Dido's phrase about Æneas, "quam forti pectore et armis!" might mean "and what a magnificent chest and shoulders he has!" Not only is Mr. Rogers incapable of literary wobblings of this kind, not only is he well read and as capable of illustrating his text by quoting from Shelley as from Terence Mulvaney, but we will give a little instance of the sound work that he does in the way of scholarship. It seems incredible that the Scholiast and all the commentators should have failed to understand the following passage, and translated βάπτουσι by "wash," as Mr. Rogers tells us they all do.

πρῶτα μὲν γὰρ τάρια  
βάπτουσι θεριῶν κατὰ τὸν ἀρχαῖον νόμον  
ἀπαξάπασαι.

Mr. Rogers conclusively shows in his note that

this does not mean that they rinsed their wools in hot water, but that they dyed them. He cites the well-known comparison in the "Republic" of dyeing with education where βαπτειν ἐρία is the very phrase used. As for Mr. Rogers' metrical version, it is delightfully musical and idiomatic, and the choruses go sparkling along like those of a Gilbertian play.

Thinking of Mr. Gilbert, the Aristophanes of our days, it may be asked why metrical comic drama does not bulk more largely in our literary outlook. We fear the answer must be that a modern burlesque audience is very much below the Greek level. The public had to be educated to the Gilbertian drama and coaxed to it with most tuneful music before they took to it at all, and even then they were liable to miss the most obvious points. They thought, for example, that the song in *Ruddigore* about the "bold Mounseer" was not a skit on English braggadocio, but a serious insult to France. Nor do we think that they would recognize allusions and quotations after the manner of the Greeks of old. Taking Mr. Stephen Phillips as our Euripides—which will be a change to him after being so much likened to Sophocles and Æschylus—there is probably no line of his better known than this—

"And all the rivers running to the sea."

Nevertheless, if a modern burlesque writer were to

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## *Aristophanes Naturalized*

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quote or parody the line, we seriously doubt whether it would be recognized by more than about five per cent. of the audience in any part of the house. It is not a matter of desperate importance. The ability to recognize quotations is no necessity of national happiness or greatness; in this matter a nation, "though very poor, may still be very blest"—nevertheless, it will do us no harm to reflect that if we want an occasional Aristophanes we must become a little less Bœotian.

*Saturday Review*, August 2, 1902.

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## *Lucian Old and New*\*

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**A**. TIRESOME essay in dispraise of Lucian comes to hand inopportunately enough at a time when the world of letters is lamenting the brilliant writer, who, in taking so famous a name for his book of "confabulating dead," was never held to have taken it in vain. To Colonel Hime Lucian's very nationality is heinous. "His narrow, Asiatic mind saw but two of life's many faces—the foolish and the vicious." In a lengthy and futile passage, Peregrinus is acquitted of parricide, only that his historian may be condemned as a calumnious Oriental. "Although a Syrian, he had some regard for truth," is the grudging admission of Colonel Hime. "I honoured wisdom," says Lucian to Pascal, in Mr. Traill's dialogue, "I revered virtue ; I would have kissed the feet of Truth, if I could have found my way to her through the crowd of philosophers." An un-biassed reader of Lucian will probably think these

\* "The New Lucian," by H. D. Traill. New Edition, revised and enlarged. London : Chapman and Hall. 1900.

"Lucian the Syrian Satirist," by Lieut.-Colonel H. W. L. Hime. Longmans, Green and Co. : London, New York, and Bombay. 1900.

words truly and pathetically expressive of a certain unsatisfied longing which seems to underlie his satirical invective. They are true also of his sympathetic impersonator.

Of the limited outlook upon life of the ancient writer as compared with the modern, there is an exposition put by Mr. Traill into the mouth of Landor.

The Greek of antiquity has mastered the secret of perfection in literary form ; and in one department of thought—the philosophic—we can add little or nothing to the work which he has accomplished. But in all else—in the interpretation of human affairs, in the ordering and elucidation of the facts of nature, and in the deeper analysis of human feeling—the cultivated modern might throw open a school to receive him. In these things the most learned and highest endowed Greek of antiquity would be a child in our hands. It is this limitation of range which makes Lucian, in a sense, inferior to his modern imitator ; and this is especially true of the “Dialogues of the Dead,” which, though they contain much of Lucian’s wit, are of less enduring interest than some of his other writings. We seem in reading them to be surveying a long procession, not of characters, but of somewhat wearisome types. The unkempt philosophers—the purple but precarious monarchs—the disappointed anticipators of dead men’s shoes—the misers who

“Wake to tell  
Their shining talents o’er, and sleep at last  
Mouthing their paltry obol”—

all are marshalled to the sound of mockery towards the boat of Charon. The utterance of Lucian is the “*omnes eodem cogimur*” of a somewhat cynical malice, and its constant iteration tends to pall upon the ear. In the delightful dialogues of Mr. Traill, the interlocutors talk of all that interested them in life, and their talk wanders into regions Lucian never knew. To take the one dialogue between Lucretius, Paley, and Darwin, the names of the two latter suggest a literature considerably greater in volume than all that remains to us in Greek. Mr. Traill, in his preface to “*Social England*,” a book which, after all, presented only certain aspects of the history of a single people, summarizes the multifarious aspect of history and life to a modern. “Industries multiply and ramify; commerce begets child after child; art, however slowly in this country as compared with others, diversifies its forms; learning breaks from its mediæval tutelage, and enters upon its world-wide patrimony; literature, after achieving a poetic utterance, the most noble to which man has ever attained, perfects a prose more powerful than that of any living competitor, and more flexible than all save one; finally, science, latest of birth but

most marvellous of growth, profoundly and irreversibly, if still to some extent obscurely, modifies the earthly destinies of the race." It was in virtue of his catholicity of range that the author of the "New Lucian" was qualified to exert an influence which no one could, without smiling, think of as being entrusted to the Samosatene—an influence analogous to that which some have hoped for from an English Academy. The publicists who can pronounce a critical judgment worthy of the name in every department of politics and letters are rare indeed, and of that very select few, Mr. Traill was the publicist of most insight and energy, an energy which, as often seems to be the case, his scepticism did nothing to impair. However it may have been with the Pyrrhonists of Lucian's time, their successors of to-day suffer from no paralysis of beneficent activity. Hume, an admirer and defender of Lucian, was labelled by Warburton as "an atheistical Jacobite, a monster, as rare as a hippogriff," a sentence which reminds us of the remark put in the mouth of Lord Westbury, in the "New Lucian," that "the definitions of Churchmen are often as animated as lay invectives." Agnostic conservatives, as we should now call them, were a good deal commoner in the eighteenth century than it suited Warburton to pretend. They are, unfortunately, still more common now, and tolerably safe even from episcopal censures. But, from



whatever point of view we judge him, the author of the "New Lucian" had nothing of the mere barrenness of scepticism. There has been no more inspiring prophet of the loyalties that are not impossible, the loyalties of virtue and veracity, of kindliness and courage, than the wit and poet whose verse dedication of the earlier edition of his book may have been haunting many memories for the last sixteen years, and stands again before us now as his pathetic farewell to an entertaining world.

*Saturday Review*, March 3, 1900.

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## *No Pleasure in Politics*

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**C**HOKE me the chattering crowds, which  
hourly prate  
Of battles and embroilments of the  
State,

For better survey of mankind's mishaps  
Vexing with daily pins outlandish maps,  
Who in our lurid Babel gape intent  
On the trans-shifting scenes of Government,  
Nor would not mark at all what seasons pass,  
Save by subvertings of the party-glass.

Thrice happier he to whom red leaves bewray  
The irreparable ebbing of his day,  
Who, present at the bridal of the spring,  
Hath seen her clouds whitely processioning,  
And from a homely lattice hath beheld  
Her trailing showers drop fatness on the field ;  
He the soon coming of his July knows,  
By the repullulation of the rose,  
Telling the time by flowers, and makes of these  
His Calendar and Ephemerides.

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## *Lord Beaconsfield*

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*April 19, 1881*

“ **A** PLEASANT thing it is to look from  
land  
On them that greatly toil in troubled  
seas ” :—

So sang the strenuous votary of ease ;  
And many such there be, that loved to stand  
Aloof, and trace thy courses deftly planned  
By shoal and shelf, and set to every breeze,  
Or watch some billow of rebellion seize  
The helm, nor snatch the tiller from thy hand.

Yet some, for that lost pleasure, gain to-day  
A tearfuller and truer, while they mark  
How scathlessly from out the fury and foam  
Of factious words that waste themselves away,—  
How honourably glides thy veteran bark,  
After long wars, safe to the haven, home.

*St. James's Gazette, April 21, 1881.*

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## *Rabelais and Sterne\**

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**O**F all writers who still make appeal to posterity, Rabelais seems to demand the most esoteric audience. As Mr. Whibley justly says, every man is either born a Rabelaisian or he is not. There is no middle way of indulgent toleration. When Browning wrote that he

“Forgot the oaf  
Over a jolly chapter of Rabelais,”

James Payn wondered where he found the jolly chapter. The author of “High Spirits” was assuredly not incapable of sympathy with honest laughter, though he had some curious blind sides to his mind. He said, for example, *mirabile relatu*, that he would sooner read Bradshaw than Peacock’s novels. As regards Rabelais, the plain fact of the matter probably is that Rabelais simply disgusted him. And, really, who that dips into

\* “Rabelais.” Translated by Sir Thomas Urquhart and Peter le Motteux, Annis 1653–1694. With an Introduction by Charles Whibley. The Tudor Translations. London: David Nutt, 1900. 3 vols.

“The Works of Sterne.” The Library of English Classics. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1900.

Rabelais can wonder ? It is no great matter, perhaps, that Rabelais should scandalize a modern audience unaccustomed to make literary or historical allowance ; but he scandalized a good many of his contemporaries. Mr. Whibley makes the usual apology for Rabelais, and uses what may in this connection be fitly called the “whole hog” argument—that whole hog which Rabelais went with such a will and such a vengeance. “Foul as his book is, it is never indecent.” One is reminded of the dialogue in *As You Like It*—

“AUDREY. I am not a slut, though I thank the Gods I am foul.

TOUCHSTONE. Well, praised be the Gods for thy foulness ! Sluttishness may come hereafter.”

The reader confronted with these unpleasant options and assured by Mr. Whibley, doubtless with an eye to Sterne, that Rabelais always laughs and never smirks, may perhaps think of Rufillus and Gorgonius—

“Pastillos Rufillus olet Gorgonius hircum”—

and decide to give a dubious vote in favour of Rufillus. There are some to whom the mixture of levity with coarseness is so distasteful that they have half a mind to ask for the unadulterated article as supplied by Swift’s “*anima Rabelaisii habitans in sicco.*” It was the phrase of Coleridge ; and the mention of Coleridge suggests that recoil

of the judgment upon itself which adverse criticism of the great names of literature is bound to bring about in a candid mind. It is not as if it were Coleridge alone who classed Rabelais with Shakespeare, Dante, and Cervantes, and spoke of the "moral elevation of his work." Coleridge, Browning, Carlyle, and Taine, are only four out of fourscore competent judges before whom Rabelais stands self-justified. The gist of all Rabelaisian apologetics is contained in Taine's description of him as a "good giant who rolls himself joyously about on his dung-hill thinking no evil." This defence will always produce revulsion rather than conviction in many minds, but, when all is said, Rabelais is one of those great facts of literature in the face of which it were vain to fly. People who cannot see the merits of Rabelais may do wisely to be quiet and remember George Eliot's rustic, who said that some people are unaware of ghosts because they have not got the "smell for them."

In any case, as long as Rabelais continues to be read, let him be read in a good edition—and we cannot imagine a better or a more beautiful than this. After the clever and readable introduction by Mr. Whibley, the reader is left alone with a luxurious reprint of the best available texts—a good method which we are glad to see upon the increase. Rabelais was immensely lucky in his first translator, nor, as Mr. Whibley has it,

“could the French prose of the sixteenth century, new formed and unweakened as it was, have found a better match than Elizabethan English run to seed.” By Motteux’s time something of its racy virtue and vigour had begun to go out of the language, and, just as Urquhart is a survival from the spacious times of great Elizabeth, so Motteux is a coffee-house forerunner of the tea-cup times of hood and hoop. We must take exception to Mr. Whibley’s remark that in the phrase, “Boys have now a rhinoceros nose all the world over”—which it seems Rabelais used in an early preface—we “have perhaps a trick of the real Rabelais.” It is of course simply Martial’s line—

“Et pueri nasum rhinocerotis habent.”

In the same way, if we do not misunderstand him, Mr. Whibley seems to attribute the metaphor of the “ox upon the tongue” to Rabelais instead of to Æschylus.

Passing on to Sterne, we find that besides “Tristram Shandy” and “The Sentimental Journey,” this edition admits a few little extras, such as “The Fragment” in the manner of Rabelais, but excludes all the letters and sermons. In some ways we regret this; though it may be true that Sterne’s correspondence would hardly be entitled to come under the heading “Library of English Classics.” Of Sterne’s verbal plagiarisms

from Rabelais and others it is very easy to make too much. The late Mr. Traill, for example, was unduly hard on Sterne in this particular. He said it was "unpleasant" to find that some of Mr. Shandy's philosophic reflections had been "conveyed" from Burton. Sterne uses the phrase "Tacitus informs us," and Mr. Traill's comment was—"Tacitus does, it is true, inform us of this. But it was undoubtedly Burton who informed Sterne of it." The standard implied here is in our opinion absurdly high and hard. It is part of the praise of the "Anatomy of Melancholy" that it has always been considered a good field for the industrious gleaner. But, apart from these minute burrowings and borrowings, there is a sense in which Sterne inherits directly from Rabelais, who, in Mr. Whibley's words, "has yet another claim on our regard : he may be said to have invented the literature of digression," that tortuous and leisurely literature which, like the Mæander, "versas in se sæpe retorquet aquas," and demands, as in the case of "Tristram Shandy," three volumes of a novel to get its hero even born, and three more to get him put into breeches. This legacy of digression may be of doubtful advantage to Sterne in his struggle for literary immortality. *Non omnia legimus omnes*—we have all left gaps in our reading, and there will be many—at all events, many of the young—who will make their first acquaintance with Sterne in this excellent



edition. How many will be able to tolerate his prolixity—to say nothing of his indecorum? As to his indecorum, we may just revert to what we indicated in the case of Rabelais; adding only that we get in Sterne, as compared with Rabelais, a diluted effluent and an attenuated virus—an attenuation which, however, is considered by those who apparently adopt a sort of principle of homœopathy in literature to make it all the more virulent.

And yet, heavily as Sterne has handicapped himself, we believe that he will maintain his position in letters. In Mr. Watson's golden phrase, his greatness, not his littleness, concerns mankind, and if it be true that he has added to that "world of immortal shadows which to some of us is more real than our own," three or four new characters and three or four scenes and episodes of unforgettable charm, it is not his affectations that will put an end to him. This is what Sterne has done. The evidence may be found between these red covers; but for a short cut to a just appreciation of "Tristram Shandy" we would refer to what has been written on the subject by Leigh Hunt. Sterne's humour and acuteness might hardly by themselves have kept him afloat, but he was also full of the milk of human kindness, and the combination is very strong. Let the reader turn to the episode, not of the dead, but of the living ass in the seventh

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## *Rabelais and Sterne*

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volume of "Tristram Shandy." "The critic," said Thackeray, "who refuses to see in it art, humour, pathos, a kind nature speaking, and a real sentiment, must be hard indeed to move and to please." Because Sterne has so moved and pleased ourselves we are persuaded of his enduring power to move and please others.

*Saturday Review*, October 20, 1900.

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## *Sheridan* \*

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**O**F two illustrious Irishmen of birth not precisely illustrious, Sheridan and Burke, it might have been said at any time during their later years that they were by no means "parvenus," but "arrivés." And yet, in the London of their day, to be Irish was little less disadvantageous than to be Scotch, and when we think of their fellow-countryman Goldsmith and of their great contemporary Johnson—men not inferior in powers of mind—the reason of the great success in life of Burke and Sheridan is not immediately obvious. Mostly, no doubt, it was the fact that they applied their power to politics, that landed Burke at Beaconsfield and gave Sheridan the option of "hiding his head in a coronet"—though, as a first step to public life, such literary glory as came to Burke from his imitation of Bolingbroke, or to Sheridan from his plays, was even then in the same way useful as their humdrum versification had been to the Addisons and Priors of an earlier generation. But we take it

\* "The Plays of Sheridan." London : Macmillan. 1900.

that it was also largely a matter of money. When the youthful Burke wrote the "Treatise on the Sublime," his father, a delighted Dublin attorney, sent him a hundred pounds, but even such a small windfall as this never came to Goldsmith or Johnson, who went respectively through a mill of poverty unknown to the other two. Both Burke and Sheridan had that curious knack, which many men still possess, of getting their financial pottery to swim unbroken by the side of brazen vessels. Such men reverse the phrase of Horace, and are "in magna inopia non inopes." How it exactly was that Burke managed to finance his own life has remained a puzzle to his biographers, but, in some way quite impossible to a man such as Goldsmith, manage it he did, and in like manner Sheridan, whose sources of income if more evident were also more precarious—and who was besides absurdly extravagant—contrived, like his own Charles Surface and in spite of his "distresses," to ruffle it to his last hour with the rich, and died, not, as has been so often repeated, in the squalor of an attic, but surrounded with every circumstance of comfort. The story of his untended death-bed, first circulated by Croker, is typical of such a mass of myth in connection with Sheridan that we take this occasion of mentioning to such of our readers as may be unaware of its existence the book in which Mr. Fraser Rae, so lately as four years ago, unveiled the real Sheridan for the first time.

They will find there many previously unpublished "human documents" in the shape of old letters, etc., which, great as their interest is, we cannot dwell upon now.

In the mean time a critic in *Blackwood* has been telling us that not Sheridan, but Congreve, is the true representative of our best comedy, and that Sheridan owes his position to-day to the accident that he wrote at a time when Mr. Lang's mysterious wave of "literary decency" had already swept over England and the satirical lament was heard that—

"Our decent manners all obscenity flout,  
And wit is at one entrance quite shut out."

As regards Sheridan, we may well give him the individual credit of eschewing grossness, when we find his sister-in-law writing to his wife, "You know that Sheridan hates indelicacies;" and we should think it quite calumnious to say, as does Mr. Street, that Sheridan put "a few unnecessary innuendoes" into the *School for Scandal*. The tone of his love letters to his wife, both before and after their marriage, and his letters to a school friend given by Mr. Fraser Rae, seem to make it highly probable that his sister-in-law's compliment was well deserved. But after all, the essayist we have in view has the respectable taste of thinking meanly of Sheridan as a dramatist, and let us concede him all we can. Let us admit that a

Restoration dramatist would have treated the Teazle situation in a very much coarser way, and—to drop controversy in the presence of genius—let us admiringly add that Congreve in creating Millamant presented us with a breathing type beside which Lady Teazle herself is lifeless. Millamant is undoubtedly a “rogue in porcelain” who might be expected to adorn a Meredithian novel rather than a Restoration stage, but, returning to our point, Mr. Street seems to forget that Congreve, though he outlived many or most of them, was one of the “men without hearts,” and that Sheridan was not. Sir Henry Irving singled out Sheridan’s “humanity” as his strong point; and, in spite of the critics with whom paradox and platitude are convertible terms, we would rather take this view than follow Macaulay’s lead and lump Sheridan and Congreve together as writers who wrecked comedy by sacrificing character to dialogue. The *School for Scandal* is a very human play. For playgoers of our own generation, the pathos of Sir Peter has been enhanced by the ideal impersonation of Mr. William Farren, but reperusals of the piece can leave no doubt in a candid mind of the essential good-heartedness of its author. We are often enjoined to set against this the fact that Sheridan made Old Rowley and Sir Oliver as witty as the others, but, after all, this only amounts to Leigh Hunt’s uncomplaining complaint against Shakespeare that

he made his minor characters talk as well as he could himself; nor does there seem to be any real reason why Sir Oliver should not have been gifted with a cynical and celibate humour. In any case, this is a defect which the human public readily forgive, and if they want something different—we say it unsneeringly—they have always Ibsen and Mr. Shaw. Rogers, it seems, gave his preference over the *School for Scandal* to *The Rivals* because—"exquisite humour pleases me more than the finest wit." There is plenty of wit in *The Rivals*, and one can only suppose that Rogers was thinking of the oozing courage of Bob Acres—a form of humour which, in the opinion of some, it takes no little wit to redeem. Sheridan's great acting play never falls to this plane.

We say regretfully his great acting play; for *The Critic*, his most flawless literary production, is as good or better to read than to see, and the comicality of such things as the conspirators' prayer, though not very recondite to a lettered mind, is quite over the heads of average audiences. It is curious to remember that the Duke of Buckingham's *Rehearsal* was still being acted when Sheridan was young, and that *The Critic* took its place—to be ousted in its turn in this last decade by the *Pantomime Rehearsal*, a skit truly delightful and laughable, and, in the confusion of gratitude, by no means unworthy to be ranked with the play

of which Johnson rather too unkindly said that it had not wit enough to keep it sweet. Nevertheless, where will be the *Pantomime Rehearsal* when it loses its present admirable caste? The confusion of "Bellerophon" with "ruffian," and the "teeny tiny twinkling elves" are a rather abrupt descent from the classical finish of *The Critic*.

To the excellent series which includes this volume of Sheridan's plays we shall return, but we may say here, in view of future reprints, that we are promised in a prefatory bibliographical note a sound emendation—"waive" for "wave" at the very end of *The School for Scandal*—which has not been adopted in the text. To borrow the language of Sheridan's honoured fellow-countryman, the editor has not in this little matter taken care to see that what he thought best was done.

*Saturday Review*, June 16, 1900.



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## *The Eighteenth Century*

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**D**EAR lost delightful people! You to  
whom  
Belonged our griminess without our  
gloom—

Grimy, because I gather on the whole  
You suffered rather much from “sea-borne coal”—  
And to-our-own-not-far-inferior fogs  
Crept from the isles of Sheppey and of Dogs—  
Beneath your beeches let me lie to love  
The increbescent murmur of the grove—  
Or what queer foliage might a Gainsborough spread  
In tufts behind a scarlet hero’s head,  
While Humphrey plans a bridge or Repton crowns  
With unexpected clumps the astonished downs.  
Here Thomson sat—here gentle Gray forsook  
His many tomes to pore upon the brook—  
Here let great Gibbon entertain my days,  
The unprecarius monarch of the phrase,  
From flinty fields till curlews call the night  
And woodlarks welcome the immortal White!

From underneath the eyebrows of this wood  
I marked where Laureate Pye’s old pointer stood—  
Much like his sons he stood—with stiffening tail  
Sagacious of his eighteenth-century gale,

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## *The Eighteenth Century*

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While hotly hustled by sequacious Don  
The hedgerow pheasant flustered tail end on.  
And now to Fancy's long unsummered hill  
The music of the hounds of Somerville,  
And far and frosty is the music borne  
Of teams a-trotting to their other horn.  
There Pope a-horseback Binfield-bound bespoke  
His midnight blessing on the moonlit oak,  
And by the skin and edging of his teeth  
Escaped attention from some bold Macheath ;  
And later from the Athens of the north  
Rode London-bound my Lord Monboddo forth—  
Red-roquelaured he rode ; to find anew  
Tea, toast, and taste with Mrs. Montagu.  
And oh ! what fire and valiancy of wit  
When Burke with Johnson strove and Fox with  
Pitt !

Cease, desultory Muse, nor undertake  
To wind into a subject like a snake :  
Thee, Johnson, I forbear and, Boswell, thee,  
Who summ'st and art that eighteenth century !

*Saturday Review*, September 12, 1903.

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## *Sir Leslie Stephen on Trollope\**

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**O**F our modern mob of gentlemen who really do write with ease, and whose easy writing produces the very reverse of hard reading, Sir Leslie Stephen stands perhaps at the head. What unembarrassed erudition—what *callida junctura* of thought with thought and phrase with phrase! “In sequent toil all forwards do contend.” Sentence after sentence rolls plop into its pocket like a pool-ball at the dictation of “Doodles” in “The Claverings”—“as easy as shelling peas” is the onlooker’s phrase. And far be it from us to try to arraign this biographer born and made by saying, as men have always been saying of Macaulay, that it is a too cocksure monotony of success—that he ought to have broken down more often at some difficult shot—that he had more pleased us had he pleased us less, and was, in fact, so good that you might call him bad. Of the initials “L. S.” the name, the honour, and the praise shall live so long as the beautiful abbreviations Dict. Nat. Biog. and Brit. Mus. Cat. shall

\* “Studies of a Biographer,” by Leslie Stephen. Series II. Vols. 3 and 4. London: Duckworth. 1902.

continue to confront the eyes of men. But in these volumes of what are in effect additional Hours in a Library we do think that a very versatile mind has shown itself strangely unawake to the wonderful genius of Anthony Trollope.

The word "genius" in this connection will of course surprise some, but then, to what a crass audience has not even great talent such as that of a Wilkie Collins to appeal! We have lately been promised a boom in Trollope. The units of literature's immortal armies can hardly care exactly when they get that "great lift" which the Bible revisers were said to have given the Evil One, but in our belief Trollope will in the end be found as imperishable as Miss Austen. Sir Leslie strikes his first disparaging note in saying that if we want to get to like Trollope we had better begin with his autobiography. "Get to like Trollope"! As if his enchanting pages were *absinthia taetra* to be coaxed down literary gullets by the sugary condescension that after all he was an honest if somewhat overbearing man—"broadcloth without and a warm heart within"—and a great lover of the chase! It has been Sir Leslie Stephen's lot to have seen him and heard him and known; but those of his juniors whose minds have been peopled with Trollope's personages from boyhood up must have had to cling closely to the truism that men are not like their books when they were faced with indubitable

witness that it was a man, to say the least, bluff and brusque and breezy who had given us these books so eminently and exquisitely urbane.

Trollope has been sometimes thought unduly unsensational. What in the name of wonderment did these people want? In Trollope's pages diamonds are dramatically burgled away at midnight; wicked peers are pushed over sea-cliffs by indignant mothers; a prominent politician is murdered in the dark passage past Lansdowne House; a suicide, not previously unobserved, as Trollope knew, by some sort of inspector on the platform, walks in front of the up express with the usual result; the major insists on riding a dangerous mare to her death and his own—it sounds like Smedley, "like, but oh, how different!"—and lies stoically dying upstairs, to the music of the ball beneath, which it has been decided not to defer—one of Trollope's fine scenes that, and only one out of such hundreds! It has been said, again, by those who cannot judge the quality of the finished product and have no notion of how it is produced, that Trollope was no artist because he was industrious enough and energetic enough to force himself to turn out a certain number of words a day. He thought, in fact—and who that has ever written in the very smallest of ways can doubt it?—that a careful liver who will set himself doggedly to his desk can turn out some not unworthy specimen of his

style and of himself. But, after all, the real point, the real proof of this Trollopian pudding, is in the eating. To our thinking, the quality of the pudding was surprisingly uniform right down to the days of "Dr. Wortle's School"—a wonderful example of Trollope's power of making much out of slight material. James Payn records that he said the same thing to Trollope about his "Editor's Tales," and the novelist agreed, but feared the book had had few readers.

The mere sensation hunter—the mere barren carper at the fertility of real and rich producers—may well overlook the wonderful beauty of Trollope's prose, but we are surprised that it should not be more appreciated by this essayist and his compeers. The "Dict. Nat. Biog." tells us (over the signature R. G., not less known in the world of letters than that of L. S.) that "his diction is careless." Trollope took *ipso teste* infinite pains with his style; can it really be that he concealed his art so well that various accomplished critics have never seen it since? To us his prose, a trifle diffuse perhaps, but never surely careless, is one of his main attractions. We must transcribe some specimen; let it be the description of the slightly elderly musician playing the zither to a Viennese public in the presence of the girl he loves. "Lotta's eyes were quickly full of tears, and before long they were rolling down her cheeks. Herr Crippel, though he did not know that he

looked at her, was aware that it was so. Then came upon them all there an ecstasy of delicious sadness. Every ear was struggling that no softest sound might escape unheard. And then at last the zither was silent, and no one could have marked the moment when it had ceased to sing.

“For a few moments there was perfect silence in the room, and the musician still kept his seat with his face turned upon his instrument. He knew well that he had succeeded, that his triumph had been complete, and every moment that the applause was suspended was an added jewel to his crown. But it soon came, the loud shouts of praise, the ringing bravos, the striking of glasses, his own name repeated from all parts of the hall, the clapping of hands, the sweet sound of women’s voices, and the waving of white handkerchiefs. Herr Crippel stood up, bowed thrice, wiped his face with a handkerchief, and then sat down on a stool in the corner of the orchestra.

“‘I don’t know about his being too old,’ said Carl Stobel.”

There is no lack of matter in that ; but those who do not also see the manner of it—the style of it—are, to our thinking, simply style-blind.

But of course it was mostly his men and women who have endeared Trollope to his lovers past and present. And here, too, we are told that “he never creates—he only depicts” ! Now, may Omniscience comprehend and pardon such

a saying as that, for we never can. The line between creation and depiction does not seem easy to draw, and reminds us of the happily obsolescent squabble about wit and humour, but in whatever relation Shakespeare stood to the mind of Iago—whether he “created” or “depicted” or “divined” it—in that same relation must Trollope have stood to the too-much-talked-of woman whom he doomed at last to death in the Athenæum Club. People sometimes write as if Trollope had created nobody but Mrs. Proudie, but how his women crowd upon the mind! Lady Glencora and Lizzie Eustace and Lady Mason, and that “comfortable armful of womanhood” Polly Neefit, and that most lifelike if uncomfortable girl Lucinda Roanoke, and Arabella, and others more insipid of the Madeline Staveley kind—but “creations” all, not clothes-props; creations not “by Worth.” No wonder that it was so—for what says this so-called mechanical merchant of words about his attitude to his characters? “I have wandered alone among the rocks and woods, crying at their grief, laughing at their absurdities, and thoroughly enjoying their joy. I have been impregnated with my own creations till it has been my excitement to sit with the pen in my hand and drive my team before me at as quick a pace as I could make them travel!” And in another place: “Of all in that gallery I may say that I know the tone



of the voice and the colour of the hair, every flame of the eye, and the very clothes they wear. Of each man I could assert whether he would have said these or the other words; of every woman, whether she would then have smiled or so have frowned. When I shall feel that this intimacy ceases, then I shall know that the old horse should be turned out to grass." Can it really be only a small sect of Trollopians who, reading those words, feel in their hearts that this man's witness is true? And how intimate was his knowledge of every phase of life! From the bagmen homerically gorging their Christmas turkey in Great St. Helen's we are transported to the judge's country house, with its children and snapdragon and innocent courtship, and its hostess who "liked people to be nice, but preferred those whose fathers and grandfathers had been nice before them!" Apart from his post-office and the hunting-field, Trollope had undoubtedly chances not given to all; for instance, in 1864 he joined the "Cosmopolitan," which met twice a week in Charles Street, Berkeley Square, "and supplies to all its members and their guests tea and brandy-and-water free of charge. . . . Lord Ripon, Lord Stanley, William Forster, Lord Englefield, Lord Kimberley, George Bentinck, Vernon Harcourt, Bromley Davenport, Knatchbull-Hugessen, with many others, used to whisper the secrets of Parliament with free tongues." No bad school this

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*Sir Leslie Stephen on Trollope*

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for the historian of Phineas Finn. And then, to crown all, the critic last alluded to tells us that Trollope is "devoid of all poetical and spiritual qualities." Why, the extracts we have made in this space-hampered article disprove it. Was this man, who listens for the dying fall of a zither and enters as of right into the innermost heart not only of a Lotta Schmidt but of a Carl Stobel—who sits excitedly driving his team of characters before him as fast as he can make them travel—was this a man of an unpoetical soul? So strongly do we hold the contrary—so strongly do we believe (fancy having to say it!) in Trollope's ear for the music of humanity which to him was not always still and sad, that we feel no slightest incongruity in applying to him the lines which Tennyson addressed to his own poet brother—

“ But thou art silent underground,  
And o'er thee streams the rain !  
True poet ! surely to be found—  
When truth is found—again ! ”

*Saturday Review*, January 3, 1903.

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## *Anthony Trollope*

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**A** H ! yes—the master's touch is light,  
As ever of old ; but the well-  
known note  
Rings sadly now, for I read to-night  
The words that a dead man wrote.

The fireside hours that fled fast  
For a world that reads of its works and ways,  
These Time has taken and left this last  
Poor luxury of praise.

From weary weighing of creed with creed,  
From clash eternal of class and clan,  
The jaded sciolist turned to read  
A tale of his fellow-man.

From them that compass heaven and earth  
To spin us a riddle, we turned away  
To the love and the liking, and the mirth  
That are not of a day.

And so for the sake of that sunny side,  
And because sobriety has its charm,  
We say farewell, not quite dry-eyed,  
To the author of "Orley Farm."

*St. James's Gazette*, December 9, 1882.

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## *Une Précieuse Amoureuse*\*

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**D**ISCLAIMING all inside knowledge of this mystification of an hour, perhaps even anonymity may make so far free with a name, which has lately been in everybody's mouth, as to say that if Mrs. Meynell did not write this book she may well be flattered to have found an imitator so enthusiastic and adroit. The notion that these are "real" letters we dismiss at once with the most summary incredulity. The love-story here is just a string upon which our old friend Preciosity may thread her pearls and discourse of matters all and sundry. We are anxious not to attribute the authorship of anything to anybody. We just sit down to look over wares which are none the worse because they forcibly remind us of "Autolycus." We wonder what on earth the youth who is supposed to have received these letters would have made of them. He is mistily—very mistily—adumbrated here as something of a Philistine, and after the following fashion is it that his sweetheart

\* "An Englishwoman's Love-letters." London ; Murray. 1900.

writes to him at great length from Florence about an unnamed terra-cotta which he has never seen : “It is a fine modern *zeitgeist* piece of declamation to come out of the rather over-sweet della Robbia period of art.” But even if he yawns a little at this, he gets plenty of compensation, and when she writes to him of a crush on the Grand Canal, and the “sound of many waters walloping under the bellies of the gondolas,” he may be proud to feel that he is going to marry a girl who can turn a phrase with the best of them. Very precious and characteristic is the mouse that came out of the wainscot and troubled the repose of our pillowed heroine, till “finally a paper bag, put into a likely nook, with some sentimentally preserved wedding-cake crumbled into it, crackled to me of his arrival.” Crackled to me of his arrival ! How well we know the note ! It is absurd to complain of beautiful jugglery because it does not touch our hearts. Here are flowers of phraseology of which we have all of us nowadays got the seeds—and yet we cannot all of us grow them. Let us unsneeringly applaud the more successful exhibitors. “Non equidem invideo ; miror magis,” quoth the shepherd in Vergil ; and it may not be inapposite to remember in connection with this book and its vogue, that he was gazing, even as he spoke, upon a flock of sheep. How it exactly was that the heroine ultimately managed to encircle the bag with a noose, we found rather

puzzling—did she do it in the dark?—but there! we are not writing about mouse-traps. However, that is what she did, and she lowered him from the window, bag and all, “by string.” Not, observe, “the” or “a” string, but string—a very subtle nuance of preciousness. Next morning he had eaten his way out, and “has, I suppose, become a field mouse.”

That reminds us very much of “Dodo,” and, in fact, we like the writer best when she falls into the “Dodo” vein, as in the following: “So it is not for you to complain; your curses simply fly back to roost. Where do you pigeon-hole them? In a pie? (I mean to write now until I have made you as giddy as a dancing dervish!) Your letters are much more like a blackbird’s: and I have a pie of them here—twenty-four at least, and when I open it they sing, ‘Chewee! chewee! chewee!’” It is the thrush, by the way, that says that, and not the blackbird—but no matter, we are pleased and exhilarated. And indeed it is well we are, for “Hey, but I’m doleful” is more often this writer’s cue, and she is as woebegone as poor Mr. Daventry’s poor wife. “Ah, but you kiss me more, I think, when we say good-bye than when meeting; so you will kiss me most of all when I have to die—a thing in death to look forward to! And, till then—life, life, till I am out of my depth in happiness, and drown in your arms.”

Nothing, of course, is more likely than that this book was written "round" a plot from real life; but it appears that some accept the letters as having been sent through the post in a sequence more or less as they stand here. Our impression is that it would be fairly easy to become the Bentley of these Epistles on the ground of internal evidence; but to us, at all events, it would not seem worth while. The veriest dabbler in the production of printed matter knows that all this clever elaborate stuff—"it is a kite that I pull with my heart-strings"—"the angel of the resurrection with his mouth pursed fast to his trumpet"—was never rattled off at speed by a real young woman for a flesh-and-blood lover. It is partly just because they do not write with ease that we have more than half a liking for these "*nimis amatores ingenii sui*." If the heroine had really written all this in the way here implied, she would certainly have had no time to ride her pony or converse with the phantom family coachman of the incredible language who brought it to the door.

We feel that we are rather beating the air, but if any "plain blunt man" professes himself unconvinced, we refer him to pages 38 and 267. He will there find the heroine re-writing to the hero his own letters—"his miserales," as he calls them—with which he fills up his "hollow hours." Truly a creditable pupil! He is represented as

having a good seat on a horse, as shooting rabbits (and larks!), and not, as his lady-love's jargon puts it, "making a miss of it every time"—an everyday young man, in fact—and it is amusing to think of him "holding himself like that" merely to please his *fiancée*, like the Guardsmen in "Patience." "I venture to expect," you hear him humming, "that what I recollect," &c. But, as a matter of fact, it is only business firms who say "we note," and then proceed to write you back your own letter. It is like the "you also know" of Sir Walter Raleigh, in *The Critic*; but, as Puff says, the audience are not supposed to know anything of the matter.

So amusingly minute is the scrutiny to which these pages have been subjected that serious deductions have, we hear, been drawn from the following passage: "And it is six months before you will be in the same year with me again, and give to twenty-two all the companionable sweetness that twenty-one has been having."

"My brother Jack was nine in May,  
And I was eight on New Year's Day."

Horace Smith, confronted with his own impossibility, could only reply that he left these questions to married men; and if any deductions are to be drawn from the prose passage, we joyfully leave them to mathematicians.

And now a last word. A modern novelist



has said, out of the abundance of his heart, that if the sole copy of a fine poem were dropped in the Sahara, it could not nevertheless be lost. We will more moderately say that if the ballad of "Johnnie Kigarrow" were henceforth to be found in this volume alone, this volume would not soon be out of print.

"‘Chut!’ said he, ‘but the squeak was narrow!  
Didn’t you meet with Johnnie Kigarrow?’  
‘No!’ said I, ‘and who will he be?  
And what will be Johnnie Kigarrow to me?’”

Strange that the simple thing should touch literary ears, as it doubtless will, in a way quite out of Preciosity’s reach, and make them ask for the rest of the ballad.

*Saturday Review*, January 12, 1901

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## *Two Songs*

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**B**LOSSOM of hawthorn blooms in May—  
Never an end of true love's sway ;  
Blossom of hawthorn fades in June—  
I shall be tired of true love soon ;  
Blossom of hawthorn is gone in July—  
Darling, I must be off—good-bye !

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When rivelled roses rain their petals  
All merry madrigals are mute,  
And dust of death and sorrow settles  
On love's uplifted lute.  
Oh hours for play and flowers for posies,  
And lips were made for lovers' bliss,  
They least shall rue red lips and roses  
Who quickliest cull and kiss.

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## *Ruskin the Man and the Writer*

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IT has come to be more and more acknowledged that the great writer who is just dead will depend for his fame with posterity mainly upon the literary quality of his prose; and opinion seems for a good many years to have trended towards the view that, as a master of prose eloquence, he will be among the immortals. That his position in this respect is not even more unreservedly allowed is due partly to the fitful and sidelong way in which, with a fine disdain of publishers and bookbuyers alike, he projected his works upon the world, and partly upon the body of doctrine which they were designed to enforce. For doctrine it always was : sometimes seeming to be that of an inspired apostle, and sometimes of a crazy doctrinaire, but never delivered otherwise than didactically and *de haut en bas*. Matthew Arnold long ago noted how different were his powers when he was expounding Alpine snows and Swiss gentians, and when he was trying to force upon a reluctant audience such propositions as that "Hamlet is no doubt connected in some way with 'homely,' the entire event of the tragedy turning on betrayal

of home duty." But for literary immortality the disputability of a writer's doctrines seems to be of very little moment. It does, on the other hand, appear to be of very real import that somehow there should be apprehended to exist, at the back of his work, a human personality, and that a good one. Mere mental acumen, such as that of De Quincey, even when accompanied with great exquisiteness of phrase, does not seem to lead posterity captive in the fullest sense. When we reflect, on the other hand, on the great hold upon the world which has been given to Plato by the sort of holiness that is felt to underlie his writing—or when, to take a later and lesser example, we are confronted in Stevenson's *Letters* with a character of extraordinary nobility, we take away with us the conviction that here is a man who was greater than we knew, and that the "distant people whom we call posterity" will by their own odd rule-of-thumb mental processes come to realize the man in the rest of his work, and, having realized, will read him. If a high note of spiritual sanctity can be heard anywhere, it can be heard in Ruskin; and the disfiguring abuse with which he loaded his angry contemporaries will no doubt sit lightly enough on the unwrung withers of the next age. Apart from the obvious Hebraic influence which worked upon the prose of Ruskin, he put on record that he had been something of an imitator of George Herbert and Hooker. A

return to the long periods of the Elizabethans he did undoubtedly make, but we imagine that in so doing he was really indulging his own genius. He never produces the effect of prolonging a passage because he is unduly enamoured of his own eloquence, and the marvellous amplitude and plenitude of his phraseology seem to be only the natural outcome of a full mind—"from his glut and from his store, fine flour pressed down and running o'er." It is, we think, to this unusual fulness of mind that he owes the paucity of his imitators. To sit down and ape mere copiousness must seem, to most writers, one of the most futile of literary feats. The only Victorian prose writer to whom it has seemed to come natural to be copious has been Mr. Swinburne; but Swinburne is copious because he wishes to say some particular thing as strongly as possible, and Ruskin because he has so many particular things to say all at once. When we find the influence of Ruskin on the prose of the century compared with the great and obvious influence of Macaulay, we ask ourselves—Of what writers is the critic thinking? The preciousness of Stevenson or of Mrs. Meynell is exactly the quality that Ruskin managed always to escape. When the hero of "Treasure Island" looks down through the clear sea-water upon the two corpses with "the quick fishes darting to and fro over both," we have a piece of description which does not to most ears escape the note of preciousness; but

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## *Ruskin the Man and the Writer*

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Ruskin could write pages of description without sounding that particular string. Nor, again, can we agree with Mr. H. D. Traill, who looks upon Ruskin as the father of modern word-painting, an art which had been assiduously cultivated before the days of "Modern Painters" by such writers as Leigh Hunt, chiefly, it is true, in poetry, but, both by Leigh Hunt and his contemporaries, in prose also. When Leigh Hunt wrote of the "mud shine" in front of a London theatre at night, he was certainly a practitioner of the art which some people, for reasons best known to themselves, would like to see forbidden. It is indeed clear that poets have always been word-painters, and the interaction of prose and verse has always been close and immediate.

As for Ruskin's views on political economy and kindred subjects, it must be admitted that they merely put back our straying ideas into the old familiar pound. Probably usury is not sinful. Very likely it is not unchristian to be rich. Nevertheless, as Jowett seems to have said, there is a great deal more commendation in the Gospels of poverty merely as poverty than any of us are willing to admit. Until the world at large undertakes to define its ethical and religious creed with a precision which is perhaps impossible to humanity, and certainly most distasteful to the English mind, this deadlock of our ideals is likely to be insoluble. But in the mean time life has to be lived; and

they who live it generally show themselves grateful to writers who give them glimpses of the something afar and the possible beyond. Carlyle, whom an admirable fear of hurting the susceptibilities of his mother deterred from producing the "Exodus from Houndsditch," seems to have worked out the problem of reconciliation with more logic and consistency than his earlier writings had led the world to suppose. Failures in consistency and logic were easily to be found by his critics in the writings of Ruskin, but it is not in virtue of any such slight advantages in logical cohesion that Carlyle can outlive a writer who in beauty and pleasantness was so greatly his superior.

When we say that the fame and influence of Ruskin's writing may be established and forwarded by the fact that they had a good man's personality behind them, we say what to some will be a mere truism, but will seem to many to come into fatal collision with the doctrine of Art for Art's sake. The beauty of prose, we shall be told, as the beauty of landscape, has nothing to do with the beauty of holiness. As regards past ages, this position is not stubbornly defended; for no one is much concerned to deny that men may somehow have built their fanes more beautifully because they did not believe prayer to be fruitless, and even to-day a falling off in capacity to enter into feelings which have swayed humanity so

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## *Ruskin the Man and the Writer*

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much and so long may conceivably imply a "correlation of atrophy" somewhere else in the artistic organism. The artistic impartiality which acclaims lean Aquinas and Queen Venus in the same breath and with the same heartiness, does not seem to be establishing itself except in the aversion of the world. If, to put it at its lowest, it is really "better to be good than bad;" if some kind of truth or warrant really did underlie the death-bed utterance of Scott;—then it is not inconceivable that the works of Ruskin may be unconsciously indebted for their immortality, not perhaps to what he believed, but to the spirit in which he believed it.

*Saturday Review*, January 27, 1900.



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## *Leo XIII.'s Farewell to Life*

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### NOCTURNA INGEMISCENTIS ANIMÆ MEDITATIO

**T**HE hour is come. No longer, Leo, live,  
But face the endless paths alternative.  
Shall thine be heavenward—since on  
thee bestowed

His lifelong largesse thy ungrudging God ?  
Nay ; of those keys through long o'erlaboured  
years

So hardly carried think, and think with tears,  
Since men whom nations throne in high estate  
Haply at last may penance worse await.  
Yet lo ! but now what sweeter vision stole,  
What happier voice into thy trembling soul ?—  
Take courage, said that voice, nor live again  
Thy errant years and vex thy heart in vain ;  
From frailties flown Christ grants thy faith release,  
And gives thee here His pity and His peace.

*Saturday Review*, July 25, 1903.

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## *Under the Sycamore Tree*

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**G**AZING out, as it chanced, upon another such sycamore as gave shelter to Piscator and Venator, while they held their famous discourse and waited out the shower, we wondered whether it would be possible to say anything of the slightest novelty about Walton and Cotton. It struck us that we might institute a literary comparison between the two writers, and show how Walton's superiority of style had floated Cotton down the centuries. We ought to have known better. Not only did a re-reading of the lines called "The Retirement" make them seem well up to the high level of that poetic age, but we heartily endorse Mr. Dewar's compliment to Cotton in his preface to this beautiful edition,\* that there is not a dull line in him from first to last. The fact is that most of us who have loved Walton's "Angler" have loved it in boyhood, and it is not given to every boy to fish for trout or grayling in a clear stream. His early strategy may have been directed, like that of Venator, against the

\* "The Compleat Angler." Walton and Cotton. The Winchester Edition. By G. A. B. Dewar. London : Freemantle. 1902.

logger-headed chub that lay soaring under the willow boughs, or the perch that he saw deeper down hanging opposite the stringy roots as if he were looking into a shop window. In the literary outlook of such a boy, Cotton may have suffered by unfamiliarity of subject. Let us hope that later life has shown him many trout streams rocky and pellucid; but let us also hope that he has not altogether come to despise and discard the fish and the fishing of his youth. Sitting in a punt in the S. Patrick stream, a friend let fall words of wisdom which we always treasure. He was one whom happy fortune had permitted to pursue from boyhood the foxes of the Midlands and the stags and salmon of the North, and who had therefore some title to speak. "The man," he said in effect, "who cannot join in the sport immediately about him, be it only ratting, is not an ideal sportsman. Now in this district, the sport is to sit in a punt and catch roach and gudgeon as you and I now do." And so we lunched to the sound of the sedge-warbler, and be sure we had at our feet that stone jar of "barley wine" over which men who do not fish in punts always make so merry, though we could never notice that on dry land they were any more averse from a glass of beer than other folks. The breeze ruffled and darkened the surface of that secluded water, and there, as we sat, a wakeful eel, turning, as they will on occasions, his day into night,

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## *Under the Sycamore Tree*

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swallowed the live gudgeon on our paternoster as it lay against a bed of weeds. "The generation of eels is very dark and mysterious." We may be very fine fellows nowadays, said Stevenson, but we cannot write like Hazlitt—and so neither can we turn out the delicious phrases of a Walton or a White. As for the eel, it has been left, we understand, to a modern Italian to discover that the parent eels, making their autumnal voyage downstream, go to deposit their spawn in the deepest parts of the sea and themselves return no more to the river.

To enjoy punt-fishing a man should be his own puntsman—mix his own ground-bait, etc.—and not be "nice to foul his fingers, which good anglers seldom are." Everybody nowadays can punt, and to a punter the fixing of rypecks is a mere matter of rather painful assiduity. At what date was the fishing punt, as we now understand it, with a wet well introduced upon the Thames? One sees in old engravings family fishing parties in curious unsteady looking craft with cocked-up ends, but, when we come to think of it, we do not seem to remember seeing in the old pictures men fishing in a punt proper. A punt would undoubtedly have been very useful to Walton.

We have always rather resented the term "coarse fish." There are great black monstrosities of trout—we have the Stour above Canterbury in our mind's eye at the moment—beside which

the little bleak with his back, as Walton has it, "of a pleasant sad or sea-water green, his belly white and shining as the mountain snow" is a fine gentleman. Or if size be wanted (and mere size is not of such importance to sportsmen as non-sportsmen seem to think) surely a barbel with his clean workmanlike contours, and that raking forky strenuous tail of his that testifies to his undisputed strength in the water, looks as full of quality as a well-bred compact hunter. The bleak is a very good aquarium fish, which is more than can be said of the trout—and by aquarium we do not mean a glass tank, but any little bit of a pond in which the movements of fish can be watched on sunny days. Some years ago we put into a little concreted pond of this kind in a garden near Henley some roach, dace, bleak and gudgeon. The gudgeon began to multiply at once, just as Francis Francis said they did in a dirty old horse-pond into which he emptied the remnants of his bait-can. We observed that it took the most rapidly growing of the fry at least two years to attain the size of a small minnow. The gudgeon seemed to thrive well for a year or two and then to die out, and when we last looked at the pond we could only perceive one or two bloated veterans. In spite of periodical cleanings out, this pond usually contains many dead leaves which, as Walton says, are nauseous to fish, and perhaps the gudgeons' natural habit of grouting

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on the ground may have made them succumb to a deleterious influence which has not hurt their companion fish. In a hot noon these other fish—roach, dace, and bleak—may be seen soaring with their noses just touching the surface. Sometimes a gudgeon or two will float up and soar with them, but this is rare. There seems to be no reason why the roach should not have bred like the gudgeon. As to the bleak, they are said to attach their spawn to the undersides of rotten old punts, rafts, etc., and if this is so, some such thing might be moored for them as an experiment. The dace, another fish which it is a shame to call coarse, are far the most attractive of all. Their grace and nimbleness in turning far exceeds that of any fish we ever watched. The biggest two of these dace have been there since '97, and though not artificially fed in any way, have notably increased in bulk since we took them from their native Thames opposite Bolney Court. It will be interesting to see how long these dace live and what weight they attain. Ponds such as that we speak of have other charms besides those of an aquarium. In a dry chalk district they will be the rendezvous of every kind of bird from the wood-pigeon to the blue tit, and their margins will be kept splashed and wet all day with their bathing. For purposes of observation, both of birds and fish, a pond of this kind should have evergreens right up to the edge on at least one side, and it is desirable that

at some time of day the sun should fully illumine it so that the doings of the fish are certain to be seen. There seems to be some misconception as to the necessity of running water for what are usually thought to be stream fish. We see how well these dace have done, and as to bleak, the Furnace Pond near Brenchley is full of them. Frank Buckland records that when the Serpentine was drained years ago, three monster bleak were among the take. The chub also is considered a river fish, but there are plenty of them in the lowermost mill-pond at Crowborough. These chub frequent an absolutely stagnant part of the water, into which, however, there is a running stream higher up.

It seems to be a moot point about Thames fishing whether it has deteriorated so much as it has been for many years customary to say. The size of pike has probably fallen off; and the perch are only now recovering from the epidemic of a few years back, but in respect of other kinds, there would certainly seem to be as big fish in the Thames as ever came out of it. The record English—or may we say European?—chub was that taken in September, 1897, by Mr. Stanley Mead, the Henley fishing-tackle maker, casting with a dead frog. The fish weighed 7 lbs. 1 oz. and measured 2 feet. Venator's first chub, by the way, which was "a lusty one 19 inches in length," must on that showing have weighed

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at least  $4\frac{1}{2}$  lbs., and as he had apparently no running tackle, one wonders how he dealt with its "first furious rush." On the August Bank Holiday of 1899 we ourselves helped to land a roach of 2 lbs. 2 ozs. from one of the Shiplake house-boats—from which, in the same week, another, 1 oz. short of 2 lbs., was also taken. Both these fish were caught by absolute novices, who did not even plumb the depth, and fished with cubes of cheese stuck on great perch hooks—and yet, as our angling readers know, a man may fish all his life for roach without getting one of 2 lbs. Fired with emulation, a neighbouring houseboat owner very shortly afterwards produced a third 2-lb. fish—but this time it was not a roach, but a rudd. This April, Shiplake furnished a trout, and last July a carp, of over 10 lbs. each—substantial, though not record weights. There must be a good many carp scattered about the Thames, but they are too difficult to locate to figure largely in the dreams of Thames anglers. But, alas! we must quit the sycamore tree, our thoughts still running on chub-fishing and the lavender-scented sheets of old hostelries, and other delights which, as our father Walton was aware, are too good for any but anglers or very honest men.

*Saturday Review*, May 31, 1902.



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## *Unpopular Astronomy*

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**O**F two points which occur to us with regard to astronomy, it cannot, we think, be a waste of time to insist, at all events, upon the first—the astounding ignorance which prevails of its most elementary facts. We appeal to any reader, whether the next time he dines out he is not quite likely to find himself sitting next to somebody who does not know the difference between a planet and a star, or the relationship to the stars of our sun, and, what is really staggering, does not care. There is a point at which an entire absence of intellectual curiosity becomes animal, and almost repulsive. For consider what this particular form of indifferentism means. Most men seem to be vaguely aware that they are walking about a sort of ball suspended in space, nor should we think for a moment of asking them to deal in subtleties, or remember, much less realize, which is difficult for all of us, that the feet of Cousin Katie in Australia, or of Cousin Jack at the Cape, are nearer to us than their heads. But we do think that a grown-up man who finds himself perambulating “The Ball,” as eighteenth-

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## *Unpopular Astronomy*

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century poets called it, and does not care any more than the monkeys at the Zoo whether there are any similar balls in existence, may fairly be ranked with the creatures who are content if their hutches can be made to rustle with sufficient straw. We do not think we underrate the general indifference and ignorance—though perhaps the “Message from Mars,” and other “Martian” sensations, may have caused much curious astronomic lore to be handed about in drawing-rooms—but let our readers try it for themselves. The best way to try it is to find out—it can be done without his knowing it—whether your interlocutor knows the relationship of the sun to the stars—you must be careful, of course, not to say “the other stars.” If he is sound on this point, he probably knows as much as can reasonably be expected of him.

Heaven forbid that we should counsel people to go about making bores and prigs of themselves about the stars or anything else—but such topics do occasionally crop up of themselves, and there is, moreover, a very definite and exceptional reason why the average man ought to be less ignorant of astronomy than of any other science. The usual pleas of “can’t know everything” and “too busy” are not available here. It is not too much to say that an intelligent man could acquire the sort of information we are thinking of in a single wet Sunday—in fact, he ought to be able to read Macmillan’s shilling primer on the subject in less

than that time. It is indeed a case of "what sages would have died to learn, now taught by cottage dames," except that the chair of the cottage dame is occupied by Sir Robert Ball or Sir Norman Lockyer. It is in this that astronomy stands alone. Those of us who may have attempted in later life to get some decent grasp of such subjects, say, as physiology or architecture, find ourselves continually regretting that we did not spend one little year in a physiological laboratory or a builder's office. Besides, it really does require some kind of energy to start to dissect a rabbit or analyze a moulding. But put our novice in front of his primer and he has it all plain sailing before him, like the first proposition in Euclid. He may perhaps ask (we have heard him ask) whether it is certain that the information he is to find is true? He must, of course, be asked in turn how much of his own or anybody else's knowledge can really be at first hand?—how it is that no astronomer with an eye to his own immortality and emolument attempts to upset our modern astronomy?—and he must finally be confronted with an almanac. A successful prophecy appeals to the average man much more than a successful experiment, and if he can be induced to read far enough to find out what it implies to predict an eclipse or the return of a comet, he will be found admitting that there "must be something in it," and will embark upon a book which he can surely not find dull. To get

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to know for the first time what so many greater than himself have not known, the causes of the seasons or the equinoxes, and that the sun and moon are not, as Lucretius queerly surmised, "exactly of the size that they appear to us to be"—to get, in fact, some faint glimmering of the scale upon which the universe is built—surely these are things of interest, not only in themselves, but as throwing light upon man's place and importance in the scheme of things. The man who walks this planet rejoicing in his "don't-know-where-he are" attitude is, we repeat, to our thinking no better than Pope's pampered goose. If, in addition to this general knowledge, he give himself the trouble to know the constellations by sight, he will find it pleasurable in the same way as it is to know the wild flowers in the hedges. It will, of course, take him longer, just as it would take a boy longer to know something of the botany of the Bath road, than to have a very good useful idea of the road as a whole by traversing it on a bicycle.

We are afraid we have gone too fast, for although there is nothing but pleasure in knowing the outward aspect of flowers or constellations, we wish we could assure our imaginary novice that what he finds in his primer is warranted to leave his serenity undisturbed. In fact, if after reflection he avows himself to be one of those, and there are not a few, who prefer deliberately to shut their

eyes to the facts of the universe—to hide their head in some kind of sand—or use it perhaps, as in “Candide,” for the contented potting of eternal bulbs—why in that case we must take our leave of him, with our best apologies for having likened him to various animals. In the mean time, it would seem inevitable that European man in general, “sanctius his animal mentisque capacius altae,” should continue to lift up his countenance to the stars—

“Cold fires, yet with power to burn and brand  
His nothingness into man.”

We hope, by the way, that the folks who discoursed so much about Tennyson’s pilot will not write to point out that he has here made another error because the stars are presumably extremely hot. But, in all seriousness, and in despite of Young’s saying about the undevout astronomer, let Tennyson’s later utterance, “Vastness,” bear testimony that for some, perhaps many, never has religious faith had a heavier burden to bear than this of astronomy. As Mr. Mallock has elaborately pointed out, the ancient world, looking upon the earth as something flatly extended like an *œuf sur le plat* with indeterminate margins, had delightful possibilities of fancy and hope. They could sow a circumambient ocean with Islands of the Blest, or even in Hellas, the hub of their universe, “have sight of Proteus rising from the sea.”

Mr. Leslie Stephen has said that Wordsworth ought not to have yearned to be a pagan—for had he not got the sea itself, of which Proteus was only a personification? We hope that there are many who can find in some such line of thought as this a happy issue out of all their difficulties.

Passing on to the second of the two things which we started to say, we cannot better introduce it than by referring to one of those delightful bits of solemn humour which Johnson left buried in the unread pages of the "Idler." "There are men yet more profound who have heard that two colourless liquors may produce a colour by union, and that two cold bodies will grow hot if they are mingled; they mingle them, and produce the effect expected; say it is strange, and mingle them again." If Johnson meant this in any way as a side attack upon the serious chemists of his age, he did them, of course, a gross injustice; but we are inclined to think that the cap may fit a certain type of mere star-gazer, who "says it is fine, and looks at it again." Saturn with his ring is indeed a lovely telescopic object—"in size no bigger than an agate-stone on the forefinger of an alderman"—but surely there ought to come a time when the star-gazer wishes to get "farrarder," and this, if he is only an amateur, he is not very likely to do. He has neither the instrumental nor the mathematical equipment. Sir Robert Ball's fascinating

book upon "The Cause of an Ice Age," for example, is not intended for astronomers alone, but the grateful lay-reader is in the unfortunate position of finding that the whole argument really turns upon a mathematical problem, which is relegated to a note, and with which he is extremely unlikely to be able to grapple. The unprogressive character of amateur astronomy might surely induce its votaries to turn their attention to other branches of science. A Scotch stonemason or cobbler may do fine original work in geology or natural history, nor are the heavenly bodies the only things which can be looked at through lenses. It is said that a lucky Continental naturalist once watched, through a telescope, a cuckoo lay an egg and carry it into a nest : or if outdoor work be preferred, there is, no doubt, any amount to be accomplished with a microscope. Meteorology, again, is a subject which amateur astronomers in a favourable situation might make peculiarly their own. We may seem to be blowing hot and cold—to be deprecating with one breath the general ignorance of the results of astronomic research, and decrying that research with the next—but the research that we decry is only that of the ill-equipped and ill-qualified amateur, whose industry and devotion might be enriching other fields of science, and such a view is not inconsistent with a deprecation of the general ignorance of facts so easy to be known. It is not that we have any

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## *Unpopular Astronomy*

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particular wish to believe in these facts. By all means let all the worlds shrivel like garments—

“Ye Gods ! Annihilate both Space and Time  
And make two lovers happy !”

but, in the mean time, to those who desire to be delivered from the body of this death, the mere *ἀπορία* of Mr. Balfour, that one belief is just as likely to be true as another, is hardly likely to be more helpful than the robust optimism of Mr. Leslie Stephen.

*Saturday Review, July 12, 1902.*



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## *Night-piece to Julia's Ædile*

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**T**HE ring-dove to his roost is flown  
From out the standing corn,  
And where he made his noonday moan  
Has moored his wings till morn.

No sheep are vocal in the fold—  
No cattle in the byre—  
Only yon dumb abysses cold  
Tremble with starry fire.

My thoughts on vaguer issues wait  
Than thy fond labour knows—  
But thou, as this world goes, art great  
And good, as this world goes.

As this world goes ! Alas ! that men  
Probing yon blue abyss,  
Can draw within their anxious ken  
No other world than this.

Yet go thy ways—Pry, preach, and purge,  
Blackmail them and black-list,  
And ever to fresh outrage urge  
The insane collectivist—

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*Night-piece to Julia's Ædile*

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Poor victims of insensate power,  
Thou leav'st them wondering still  
What God in what unhappy hour  
Left free the inhuman will !

But whatsoever place is mine—  
Behind thee or beneath—  
Against my pine I lean to twine  
My floweret in thy wreath.

Before the dews from grasses wet  
My morning foot shall scatter,  
And in the hoar-frost hedgerow set  
The merle—not thee—a-chatter.

*Saturday Review*, March 28, 1903.

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*To R. B.: an Architect*

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**A**DDICTED, it appears, to neither school  
And uncathedralled yet was Liver-  
pool—  
Stupendous thought! Sing, Muse,  
and make thy theme  
The pointed arch and trabeated beam—  
Whether 'tis wiser for the eye to suffer  
The Gothic trash of some post-dated duffer,  
Or bid him for his holy purpose stick  
To strong steel girders and the handy brick.  
I to concession not like Ruskin loth  
Make it my modest pride to like them both.  
I pass at Petersham some plain brick box—  
Dined at, I like to think, by Pitt or Fox—  
Its Attics it disclaims (and is, I am sure,  
Entirely guiltless of Entablature).  
It boasts a white Corinthian colonnade  
To catch the summery sun and wintry shade,  
Up to whose capitals bewired in vain  
Straw-laden sparrows soar and build again.  
This place of residence I may not covet,  
But none the less I like it—nay, I love it—  
I who of late—so pluvius Jove allowed—  
Saw Lincoln grey against a thundercloud,

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*To R. B. : an Architect*

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And, entering on the morrow to admire,  
Remained to idolize her angel choir.  
There stands the immortal immemorial fane,  
And they who built it shall not build again.

But thou whose fame beyond thine own abode  
Extends for miles along the London road,  
Go add thou brick to brick and stone to stone,  
Be nought original, yet all thy own ;  
Build comfortable homes for modern men,  
And sink into thyself and be a Wren.  
But, bless my soul, while here I sit too-tooing  
That's just precisely what the man's been doing !

*Saturday Review*, June 6, 1903.

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## *How dare you have Money?*

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**M**ANY readers will remember the "Two Macs" of the music-hall or pantomime stage, and how, when one of them casually produced a half-crown, the other one said to him, "How dare you have money?" The phrase passed at one time into a sort of proverb, and was not the least comical of the catchwords which have gone the way of such locutions as "all very fine and large." It really was of more interest than most of the slang expressions that flit through the mouths of men, because it went humorously to the heart of a not unimportant matter. The recent essayist\* who is going to supply us with a text for a tiny lay sermon must not take offence at anything we may say on this topic or take it as personally meant—as a matter of fact, we have found in several of his essays much information and much pleasure. In the matter of the various Byron mysteries, for instance, he seemed to us to be as acute and to the point as any essayist we ever read, and we were particularly pleased with

\* "A Book of Essays." By G. S. Street. Westminster: Constable. 1902.

his vindication of Trollope : "There was an essay in a magazine about him some time ago which I read with surprise and indignation. It had a good Samaritan air towards a neglected unfortunate. It picked Anthony Trollope up, so to speak, and, having brushed him down, called the attention of passers-by to the fact that, in spite of many unlucky deficiencies, he was not altogether an un-presentable object." This we find amusing and satisfactory ; but we feel sure that Anthony Trollope would have given no countenance to the attitude "How dare you have money?" To our essayist, on the contrary, other people's money is a grievance ; he is not well-pleased that any one should make it or should have it, and his paradoxical animus appears in his contention that any mere fool can make money in the City. "The busier part of the City community plays dominoes in restaurants, the less busy converses with hats back-tilted and hands in pockets." But the text to which we would more particularly draw attention is this—"The large number of spacious pompous houses of which one knows that the inhabitants have at least seven thousand a year is appalling ;" and then further on, "it is annoying to wait twenty minutes before one can cross Piccadilly by reason of the charioted examples of our plutocracy."

Why in magnanimity's name should it be "appalling" that other people should be blessed

with a good income? Why should a man with seven hundred a year look with anything but admiration and pleasure from his hansom, his "flying perch," as Lowell called it, or from the top of an omnibus on the well-matched horses (and very beautiful they often are) of people with from seven to seventy thousand? As for not being able to cross Piccadilly, omnibuses, carts, etc., are more often the difficulty than the "charioted plutocrat." Disclaiming any pretension to sermonize *de haut en bas* people who entertain this feeling, we must admit that we find some difficulty in differentiating it from mere envy—*invidia livor edax*—"perfectly green," like the man in the rhyme when he had eaten eighteen rabbits.

Mrs. Browning, rather unkindly and unjustly, as Lydgate in "Middlemarch" might have thought, called the human body a little city of sewers, but, thinking of the human heart, one remembers also what her husband wrote—

"I still, to believe it true for my part  
See reasons and reasons, this to begin,  
'Tis the faith that launched point blank its dart  
At the head of a lie taught original sin,  
The corruption of man's heart."

*Schaden-freude*, for example—or let us put it in that way if we can—a certain self-congratulation in viewing the mishaps of others is, if we think of it, a hideous emotion; but it is one thing to

find something not altogether displeasing in the misfortunes of others, and quite another to grudge them their prosperity. We hope rather than are certain that multitudes of people can feel their withers entirely unwrung by the immortal imputation of Rochefoucauld, but we are happy to know for a fact that many people are never for a moment tempted to be otherwise than happy to think that so many of their countrymen are rich.

There is one consideration which might seem to make this negative virtue easier; a consideration which may seem at the first blush a little sordid, but which really resolves itself, we think, into nothing worse than gratitude. Those of us who reckon their incomes in hundreds must have been rather unlucky if they have not at one time or another, "in meal or in malt"—as Tom Browne's father put it—consumed a great portion of richer people's thousands. When "up gets a guinea" in the shape of a pheasant or down goes another guinea in the shape of a bottle of champagne, we think it would be ungracious of the recipients, who might not be able to afford much luxury of this kind, not to look upon the wealth of others with a lenient eye. And, after all, how few rich men there are who are not continually giving away such things to some guest, not for any *quid pro quo*, but just because they like him! As for the blatant and bloated



*nouveau riche* of the Sir Pompey Bedell type, he is a useful character for the satirical draughtsmen, and since there must, one supposes, be a black sheep or two in these large flocks of plutocrats, perhaps some of our readers, less fortunate than ourselves, are familiar with the type. But how should it nowadays be common? It may very likely be the case that influences have been at work to improve the *nouveau riche*—anyway, thinking of H. J. Byron's play *Our Boys*, one knows that the last thing a real live buttermilk of to-day would do after he had risen to affluence would be ostentatiously to sample the butter on his son's breakfast table. That buttermilk was but a stage convention. It is no use to dwell upon exceptions—Pompey Bedells or Jabez Balfours. It is clear that most trade fortunes are amassed by the sterling virtues dear to Englishmen, by courage and tenacity, and above all by that common sense for which some men have as great a genius as Wesley was said to have for godliness. It is no use to blink these things because they sound hackneyed, and we are glad to believe that people are blinking them less and less.

Jowett said that he was afraid there was a great deal more praise of poverty merely as poverty in the Gospels than any of us liked to admit, and one might easily imagine a saintly enthusiast saying to himself, in a sense very

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## *How dare you have Money*

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different from that of the music-hall—"How dare you have money?" but that will not bear out or excuse anybody who objects to the rich man because he dislikes passing the rich man's fine house. The rich man's house and his thousands a year are to him, in the sense of the ancients, "goods" (who that is a man of this world can asseverate that he is wrong?), and, ethically speaking, it is not for us to be his judges and begrudgers. The rich man comes, objectively considered, under Stevenson's rule, which has always seemed to us the true spirit of Christianity sublimated and quintessential—"Be good yourself; make others happy."

We have throughout presupposed that our fictitious anti-plutocrat has a competence, for, alas! it is always difficult to quit this subject without thinking of the sorrowful reflection just put by Sir Walter Besant in the mouth of one of his characters, to the effect that one half of the world can never be quite happy, because the other half—the hand-to-mouth half—may at times be so entirely miserable.

Whether multi-millionaires are desirable in a community—whether Society runs at times too much after rich men, regardless of their characters—these are questions which do not in the least affect the main position, that a man who looks with a jaundiced eye upon riches simply as riches is the victim of an undesirable passion, more

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## *Otia—Essays and Reviews*

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precisely described by the Latin *invidia* than by the English "envy."

[This essay was never published, but its theme was one of Mr. Kent's favourite texts. "The whitewashing of Dives" he talked of as a mission, of which the complement was the dethroning of Thackeray, not as a man of letters, but as a moralist and human philosopher. He always intended to put his estimate of Thackeray into literary form and publish it. But it is characteristic of such minds as Mr. Kent's that their ideas the most cherished and pondered fail of ultimate expression.]

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## *Lo! the Poor Ædile*

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### INCOGNITI IN ÆDILES SÆVITIA

**I**NDIGNATOR item cum se bus plurima vico  
Sistet in effosso neque iter concedet eunti—  
Scilicet ædili frustra indignabere surdo.  
Effossum rediit. Quin effoderetur et ipse  
Conscia mens laquei vetuit, vetuitque veternus,  
Tuque alibi faciles pax nondum oblita Britannos.  
Quam lacrimam, quem non jussisti effundere  
nummum,  
Pacis sacra fames! Te inglorius auspice Glad-  
stone—  
Maximus ille opifex damni post busta sequacis—  
Deserit ingenti revocantem voce Majubam—  
Deserit in sola toties vocitatus arena  
Quem vel adhuc nugis pudet immiscere canoris.  
Continuo interea effoditur. Damni omnia secum  
Gaspiparius auctor habet—palasque ligonesque  
Uncosque cuneosque et amantes dura dolabras—  
Fit fragor. Effoderis nuper defosse McAdam!  
At ne se incolumem nostræ qui præsidet urbi  
Jactitet ædilis dapibusque accumbat inemptis—  
Si modus in rebus, si certi denique fines,  
Hos ne transiliat vecors ædilis egenum

Arguito mentis tu passer in aere tuque  
Talpa juventuti declinatissime nostræ—  
Corpus iners hodie, O Proceres, ulmoque monili !

HIS VERNACULAR VIOLENCE AGAINST  
THEM

Lo ! the poor Ædile, whose untutored mind  
Has never looked before him or behind—  
Whose soul proud Science never taught to stray  
Beyond the Welsh Harp which is Hendon way—  
Some fancied flood of urban vice he stems  
Or with some bridge unbeautifies the Thames !  
Yet ev'n to these unguided luck has given  
Behind yon primrose hill a present heaven—  
There by his hearth the beefy Ædile sits  
Grog-drowsed and warms his ineffectual wits,  
And thinks, made-free of some dissenting sky,  
His very brain might bear him company !  
Nor let our haughty plutocrats condemn  
These humble herds who live alone for them-  
Selves—who perhaps in unconsidered haste  
Waste while men want and want not as they  
waste—  
Nay, let men carve on every Christmas tree  
The great fat idle unimpressive He !

*Saturday Review*, January 17, 1903.

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## *Europa*

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*(After Moschus)*

**W**HEREAS by this two watches were  
outworn  
To that third noiseless interval  
of night,  
When first is felt afar the shuddering dawn,  
When sleep is come like honey to alight  
On limbs unstrung and eyelids overborne  
With stress of drowse and bondage of de-  
light,—  
Then, as it were a flock disfolded, streams  
All-whither forth a bevy of true dreams.

And such an undecitful vision sweet  
Did Cypris send Europa ; yet she lay  
In slumber's lap, a maid home nurtured yet,  
And of a sudden saw—oh, sweet dismay—  
Two mains of land that rival-wise did meet  
To snatch her slumbering unawares away ;  
Women they seemed, but to her dreaming  
meant  
Asia and that confronting continent.

And one is as a woman from far lands,  
And one is as a woman of her home ;  
And one by plea of motherhood withstands  
And cries upon her nursling lest it roam.  
Meanwhile, with locked indissoluble hands,  
That other urges and compels to come ;  
Hers is she, that prevailing voice avers,  
By gift of Zeus, by Fate's awardment hers.

But nimbly up with hurrying heart a-quake  
Out of her lawny couch Europa leapt  
And hearkened trembling, for as one awake  
Dreamt she that dream, and not as one that  
slept,  
And long unstirring sat, for dread to break  
The circling charm of stillness—long she kept  
On those two forms that lothly disappear,  
Her eyes grown large with fixity of fear.

Then brokenly, " Ah, whose divine behest  
Despatched this dream to set poor frightened  
me  
Thus all a-flutter from my cosy rest ?  
And who that other dame I seemed to see ?  
Surely my heart, of some strange love possessed,  
Sprang like a child's to meet her ? Ay, and  
she,  
How motherly she took my hand in thrall—  
Now for this dream may no ill thing befall ! "

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## *Europa*

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So prayed the Princess, reassured, and rose  
To call her train—each noble, each a maid,  
Like-aged, like-minded, the dear playfellows  
That tired her for the dance or disarrayed  
Her limbs of lustre like Thessalian snows  
Where tumbled to a tarn the white cascade,  
Or helped afield in hot delicious hours  
To shear and sort the sweet-breath'd lily flowers.

In duteous haste they came, and with them bore  
Flower-craving maunds, and to the meads they  
went,  
The flowery meads familiar by the shore,  
To find a fresh flower-harvest well content,  
And hear the wave that murmured evermore.  
Meanwhile Europa walked pre-eminent,  
And held to freight with flowers a wondrous  
thing,  
Divine, of more than mortal fashioning.

That casket wrought Hephæstus, and bestowed  
On Libya long gone, Poseidon's bride ;  
Telephaëssa from the kindred god  
Received for long to her own child denied,  
Even Europa, while she yet abode  
A little damsel by her mother's side—  
Glorious it is and every way it glows  
With wise enamelling of heavenly shows.



On this side Io, child of Inachus,  
Gadding distraught, of bronze is chiselled fine  
A heifer sleek. And her seafaring thus  
Through waves unpassable of homely kine  
Two watchers from a brow precipitous  
Behold god-goaded breast the shoreless brine  
In act to swim. And lo ! wrought cunningly  
She boasts her bronze against the steely sea.

And here is Zeus where Nile's far silted sands  
Roll seven ways effluent ready to restore,  
With tender sleeking of redressive hands,  
The crazy heifer to her form of yore.  
Fashioned of gleamy bronze the heifer stands,  
Of gold the god—the stream of silver ore—  
And here is Hermes round the casket's rim,  
And Argus dead with all his eyes grown dim.

But from his blood yet oozing up there springs  
A sumptuous bird disporting proudly  
His train of many radiant colourings  
Like some full sail that leans upon the sea,  
And from the crate's gold margin upward  
flings  
A sheeny span of roofage. Such to see  
Was that fair basket which Europa bore  
Through the fresh dayspring to the fateful  
shore.

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## *Europa*

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And now upon their flowery play-place come  
Each on a several way their feet they set ;  
And some aside for white narcissus roam  
And some for thyme and some for violet  
And some for odorous hyacinth. Other some  
Thin crocuses with flamy chalice wet  
Crop emulous ; and everyway there falls  
An April shower of hovering flower-petals.

Meanwhile the princess moves her maids  
among,  
Filling her white hands with the crimson  
rose.  
As Cypris when her duteous Graces throng  
About her, even so Europa goes  
Her queenly ways unbodiful. Ah, not long  
Shall all her ways be where the lily grows—  
Nor always thus inviolably bound  
The girlish zone the girlish waist around.

For Zeus beheld her and, beholding, fell  
From god to lover. Such an arrow keen  
Had Cypris pierced withal the god that well  
Beforetime knew the fierceness of the queen  
And now his godship undisguisable  
He doffs, of Hera shunning to be seen,  
And plans upon the careless-hearted maid  
In likeness of a bull his lover's raid.

A bull. But not of them the herdsman knows  
Stall-battening, nor a drudge to pace the plain  
Sundering the glossy marl with strenuous  
ploughs ;  
Cold, tawny was his coat of glorious grain,  
A silver star shone bright upon his brows,  
And his twin-horns were as the moons that  
wane,  
And his large eyes half timidly afire  
Glistened with dumb avowal of desire.

So crosses he the mead, nor they that note  
His coming quail ; but each on other cries  
To venture near and pat his golden coat  
Because the beast is lovely in their eyes,  
And round his gentle limbs such odours float  
As much outvie all meadow fragrances—  
And soon beside the bull Europa stands  
And her mute lover meekly licks her hands.

So she with travelling touch appraisingly  
Fondles the bull and flaps a slobbery flake  
Of foam away and kisses him. But he  
Low'd musically—such a moan as make  
The flutings of Mygdonian minstrelsy ;  
And knelt upon the pasture for her sake,  
Dumbly to show, with slanted neck aside,  
How broad the back whereon a maid might ride.

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## *Europa*

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Then to her maids Europa cried in mirth,  
"Come hither, dearest playfellows, and sit  
Together on the bull so broad of girth  
Like our bluff-shouldered pinnaces, and fit  
To bear a score of maids aloft from earth ;  
Not like his brother bulls that want for wit—  
Human he were, should chance of speech  
befall,  
As wise as we, and gentle therewithal ! "

She smiled and sat, while they yet doubtful  
each

On other look, when lo ! his purposed prey  
The bull uprising hurries to the beach.

She on her maids affrighted calls. But they  
Behold from far the piteous princess reach

Her hands in vain. For swiftly to the bay  
The bull hath run, and like a seagull set  
On the broad wave his hoofs that wax not wet.

At coming of the god behold there creeps  
A still-born calm across the heedful sea,  
The many-monstered herd which Proteus keeps  
Before his feet disport them fawningly,  
Up to the sun out of the dark sea-deeps  
The tumbler dolphin somersaults for glee,  
And hitherward a sea-born bevy sails  
Of Nereids white that rein their plunging whales.

Meanwhile emergent on the molten flood,  
The ruler of the sullen-muttering main  
Flatted the billows for his brother god  
And sailed before to make his passage plain,  
And from their shadowy water-whelmed abode  
Around him floated up his Triton train  
And blew on spiral conches of the sea  
Their hollow tunes for epithalamy.

But she throned high upon the heavenly bull,  
One of her venturing hands is fain to twine  
Round his bent horn, and with the other pull  
Her purple hem out of the leaping brine,  
And all the while with buoyant breezes full  
Her fluttering robe floats outward serpentine,  
And lightly lifted like a ship full-sail  
She feels the press and waftage of the gale.

Now is she as a waif that cries for home,  
In love with all she shall not see again—  
Dear steadfast hills, dear shores with edging  
foam.  
Her wistful eyes go wandering forth in vain,  
Now to the rounding heaven's high empty  
dome,  
Now to the long irremeable main ;  
And far she travelled ere her heart could bring  
Her tremulous lips to timid questioning.

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## *Europa*

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“Oh ! whither am I borne ? And what art thou ?

No bull thou art to walk this watery way—  
Nay, but for ships to stem with plunging prow  
These billows are, and should be thy dismay.  
Whence wilt thou drink, or whence win pasture now?

Art thou a god ? For surely gods are they  
Who as thou dost indifferently do keep  
Ox-wise the shore and dolphin-wise the deep.

“Hast also wings perchance ? And wilt anon  
Spring sunwards like an eagle ? Woe is me  
Wandering with no friends to look upon,  
Brute-guided o'er the solitary sea ;  
Yet, for I know thy form, Rhea's dread son  
That goest before, look back propitiously  
That I not make upon the houseless brine  
A passage all unmarked of eyes divine ! ”

Then spake the stately bull: “Have courage, Queen,  
Nor fear the billowy desert. Zeus am I,  
Lord of all shapes, and for thy sake am seen  
In this brute guise my glory to bely—  
Yea ! for thy sake has my far travel been ;  
But now for Crete our loving courses lie—  
For Crete, my childhood's cradle, there shall be  
Thy bridegroom Zeus and kings thy progeny ! ”

*Saturday Review*, December 23, 1903.

[This poem, though in its earliest form written many years before, had not received the finishing touches, which the author considered it still required, when he died.]

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## *Night and Morning*

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POST LUCEM TENEBRÆ 1882

**M**Y nimble thoughts have all too soon  
outrun  
The laggard age, and, pausing  
breathless, see  
For laughter tears and for tranquillity  
Unrest, and for their much emotion none.  
The old faiths have fallen behind me one by  
one  
And left me sorrowful. It may well be  
The day will dawn on others. As for me,  
I know I shall not live to see the sun.

Therefore herein shall be my comfort cold,  
Hearing the knell of drear self-pity rung—  
“Too late I came into a world too old”—  
In my despair’s despite to answer “Nay,  
Too soon I came into a world too young—  
Could I but watch one hour it were broad  
day!”

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## *Night and Morning*

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### POST TENEBRAS LUX 1902

Thou whom thus late I know for power divine,  
Spirit of good, enkindle thou my cold,  
Make thou humility not mockery mine,  
And make me in faith and not in flouting bold.

Break, brightness, on my dark, and let my soul,  
Whose long cold night of mockery melts away,  
Spring to the sunrise like a thing made whole,  
Ambitious of the dayspring and the day.

*Saturday Review*, August 23, 1902.

THE END



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